

# Murray Bridge South Primary School

## Attendance and Punctuality Policy and Procedures

The Education Act 1972 (the Act) provides for compulsory attendance of every child who is required to be enrolled at a school on every day, and for such parts of every day, as instruction is provided at the school for the child (subsection 76(1)) between the ages of 6 and 16 years.

### What does this mean?

Every child is required to attend school everyday. It's the law! ... And all children who are enrolled at school, regardless of their age, are expected to attend that school whenever instruction is provided. This means – children from the age of 6 to 16 are required to be at school on time and daily.

What else does this mean?

If you have learnt that attendance and punctuality are not important, how long do you expect to keep a job if you constantly arrive late or don't arrive at all?

How many AFL football players roll up to the match on Saturday late because 'they slept in,' or mum missed the alarm?

As a parent, are you seriously aware of the long term damage you are doing to your children by denying them access to a regular education? Are you aware of the opportunities that may be lost and the choices that may be limited?

As a parent, do you really want your child's learning constantly interrupted because others do not value attendance and punctuality and they 'rock up at school when they feel like it? '

**School begins at 8.50am and finishes at 3.10pm.**

### Regular attendance

The staff of MBSPS believe that students need to attend school regularly:

- In order to participate fully and gain maximum benefit from schooling;
- In order to not interrupt and interfere with the learning of others;

And ... Punctuality and attendance also:

1. Encourages practices that will advantage the child in later life;
2. Every time a child arrives at school late, the teacher needs to stop working with the others and engage the late arriving student in the lesson. This interrupts the learning of students who arrive on time and are doing the right thing.
3. Our school day is structured with a Literacy block and Reading Post each morning. By poor punctuality and arriving at school, the child is missing out on key learning time.
4. As a school we have made a number of commitments to assist students in their learning. These include employing staff to work individually with students. If students are late or absent the staff member will be reallocated to other children and the late child is again disadvantaged.

Monitoring of school attendance and punctuality identifies students at risk and allows the early implementation of intervention strategies.

## **Our Aim:**

Our aim is to ensure all children can access equitable educational outcomes.

## **Lateness to School**

A student is 'Late' to school when they report to the classroom teacher in their classroom, for the first time, on a given day, after the 'start of day' bell has sounded.

## **'Acceptable' Lateness and Absence**

'Acceptable' Lateness and Absence is any Lateness and Absence which is fully explained by a Parent or Guardian and can be documented by the staff at the school. This will include a written note, a diary note or a phone call to an appropriate person at school.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Student attendance is everyone's business and all members of the school community are expected to meet the requirements of attendance.**

The school have a legal responsibility to record and monitor attendance and take appropriate action to rectify problems of non-attendance.

## **Parent's/Caregiver's Responsibilities**

- Parents/Caregivers are responsible for getting their children to and from school.
- Children are expected to arrive at school between 8.25am – 8.50am. (Breakfast Club is available to all students every school day between 8.15am and 8.45am).
- Children must attend school every day when instruction is offered unless the school receives a valid reason for being absent eg illness.
- Parents/Caregivers must provide the school with an appropriate explanation for the student's nonattendance or lateness or early departure, within a reasonable time. Ideally for safety and accountability reasons, this explanation should be received on the day of the absence or within three days. This needs to be a written note or telephone call to the school office.
- Parents/Caregivers must let the school know if an extended absence is likely i.e. five days or longer. If the school needs to arrange work at home for students, teachers require time to prepare this.
- Work with the school on intervention strategies to improve attendance.

## **Teacher's Responsibilities**

- Provide a relevant and dynamic learning program that seeks to engage all students and offers opportunity for success, thus encouraging attendance.
- Monitor each child's attendance.
- Record absence and reasons for absence in the class absence folder and send to the front office each day – as soon as practical.
- If there is no explanation from the Parent/Caregiver regarding a student's absence or lateness for that day, the absence or lateness will be marked as "Unexplained Absence" or "Late Attendance at School."

- On the third day of an unexplained absence, lateness or if a regular pattern of non-attendance is observed the class teacher will contact the Student Counsellor for further investigation.
- All written explanations, replies to absentee notes, medical certificates and other documentation are to be kept at the school for a period of one year and made available to a Student Attendance Officer on request.
- The teacher must endorse each such note with the date on which it was received at the school. Written explanations in school diaries are acceptable. Where a diary is utilised, the school must retain a photocopy of the relevant written explanation.
- Set appropriate work for children unable to attend school when requested.
- Make Mandatory Notification as appropriate, document and store as per DECD procedures.

### **Principal's Responsibilities**

- Ensure that the EDSAS roll is accurately completed.
- Ensure intervention occurs after 10 days of accumulated absence or sooner if a student has a poor attendance record.
- If our best advice is that a student has left the school/district but there has been no transfer advice from another school after 4 weeks, the student will be made 'not active' and the Regional Student Attendance Officer will be advised. Principal will complete a letter regarding the absence of a student and send home to the Parent/Caregiver.
- Where a student leaves school during the day without the teacher's permission, the Principal will be notified immediately and parent and/or police assistance sought.
- Principal and staff will refer to a Student Attendance Officer on an ED171 (Report of Unsatisfactory Attendance) form if attendance issues are not resolved.
- Principal has delegated authority from the Minister to approve applications for temporary exemption from school attendance for periods of up to one calendar month. Parents/Caregivers should fill in an ED175 (Application for Exemption from School Attendance) form and the Principal should also advise approvals and non-approvals on school letterhead. Copies of such advices are to be retained in school files, together with applications, and are to be made available to appropriate department officers as required.
- All applications for temporary exemptions exceeding one calendar month, and for permanent exemptions, are to be set out on form ED175 (Application For Exemption from School Attendance) and forwarded to the Assistant Regional Director.
- Ensure that notifications about suspicions of neglect and/or abuse are made in addition to a referral to Regional Support Services.

### **Procedures**

- Principal and staff will document interventions, strategies, home visits, phone calls and include in student's file. The Non Attendance and Late folder to be reviewed and updated regularly as interventions occur. These documents will be securely kept in a folder in the Student Counsellor's office and clearly marked / labelled appropriately, and will be accessible by the Principal.

- The issue of continued unexplained or inadequately explained absences over a term or frequent late arrivals will be addressed through a family conference including some or all of the following: parents/caregivers, principal, school counsellor, teacher and student (if applicable).
- Students who continually arrive late to school, and disrupt the learning of others, may be suspended from school for the day (with work) on the grounds of 'wilful indifference.'

1. Attendance Rolls are marked by the classroom teacher every morning ensuring accuracy and reliability.

- This list can only include students who are physically present in the room or have been sighted by the teacher.

2. Attendance Rolls are sent to the Front Office – no later than 9.30am each day.

- The attendance records are entered onto EDSAS as soon as practical after 9.30am each day.
- Any issues or concerns, identified by the classroom teacher (note included) or by the SSO entering the data, should be directed to the Student Counsellor or the Principal, as soon as practical.

3. The names of students who are absent are entered onto the roll as per the above policy. Teachers must actively pursue written explanations for absence. These are to be kept and entered onto the rolls using the appropriate code.

#### 4. Explained and Unexplained Lateness

If a student arrives at school after the start of the school day they are marked as 'Late.'

All lateness is recorded by the school and the 'slip' from the student signing in is marked as 'F' (explained) or 'U' (unexplained).

##### F – Explained Lateness

If the student has a written note from a Parent / Guardian the lateness is accepted as 'Explained.' Confirmation of Explained Lateness can also be verbal either in person or by phone.

Confirmation of Explained absence by a sibling or unrelated person, other than a Guardian, is not acceptable.

The Principal will make the final judgement regarding the acceptability of the 'explanation' for lateness.

Continued Explained Lateness:

Principal will meet with the Parent / Guardian and seek resolution.

##### U – Unexplained Lateness

Where the Parent / Guardian has not offered a reason for the lateness, the student will be asked to 'make up' part of the lost time by doing a lunchtime Time Out to a maximum of 15 minutes.

**The Time Out is to be given via the front office at the point of 'sign in.'**

No student should enter a classroom late without a sign-in slip from the front office correctly endorsed.

## Record of Lateness

When a student arrives 'late' to school, the office staff will record the students name and reason for the lateness, in a book to be kept at the front counter. This record is to be maintained for ALL late students whether explained or unexplained.

School Council Approval

Council President \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Additional DECD requirements

### Monitoring education program participation

Schools must develop their own guidelines and processes which should be framed within DECD policy for monitoring education program participation.

Schools are required, in the first instance, to use their own resources to monitor any failure by a student to participate as required. The school must ensure that any unsatisfactory participation or unexplained absence is investigated.

Education program participation data should be used to identify students who have demonstrated patterns of non-attendance and participation, including consistent movement from school to school.

Schools may ask for the assistance of relevant agency officers including student attendance counsellors who may consult with other interagency personnel to resolve participation issues.

Absenteeism due to illness must be monitored. Medical advice from the Children Youth and Women's Health Service Access Assistant Program is that it is reasonable for a principal to ask for medical evidence of cause for absence for a student who has been absent due to reported illness for three or more consecutive days.

Similarly, where a student is absent due to reported illness for **ten or more days** in any term medical evidence might indicate that a care plan is required from the treating health professional to enable the school to provide safe health support for the student to enable improved attendance.

Where schools have concern about whether repeated or extended absence due to a chronic illness (such as asthma or diabetes) is reasonable or whether a child is well enough to attend, advice can be sought by referral to the student attendance counsellor who can liaise with the relevant Manager Regional Support Services, or the DECD Policy Advisor Interagency Health Care to inform reasonable expectations regarding attendance and requirements for recuperation at home.

### Explanation of failure by a student to fully participate in their education Program

Where a student of compulsory school age is absent from her or his education program, the **parent/caregiver is required to present a written explanation** for that absence within a reasonable time. Ideally, for safety reasons, this explanation should be received on the day of the absence or within three days of the commencement of the absence at the latest. A principal may use his or her discretion about accepting a telephone message in place of a written note. Where a written explanation is not received within a reasonable time, the principal should contact the parent/caregiver. If contact cannot be made by telephone or in person, a letter requesting information should be sent to the parent/caregiver.

All written explanations, replies to absentee notes, medical certificates and other documentation are to be kept at the school for a period of one year and made available to a student attendance counsellor on request. The teacher must endorse each such note with the date on which it was received at the school. Written explanations in school diaries will be considered acceptable if the school uses such diaries. However, where a diary is utilised, a photocopy of the relevant written explanation **must** be retained by the school.

Schools must document all information relating to non-attendance, such as telephone calls, contact with homes and mandatory notification.

Failure to retain such material will preclude DECD from taking all but the most basic of steps in dealing with these difficult problems.

The Minister or delegate may require the production of a medical certificate to an officer nominated by the Minister or delegate when a student is alleged to be absent because of illness or injury. Where a principal or delegate considers that such a certificate should be produced, she or he should report the matter in writing to a student attendance counsellor using the Single Referral Process via EDSAS, or using form ED171, specifically requesting that such arrangements be made. This should then be followed up with written advice to the parent/caregiver.

### **Unsatisfactory participation by a student in his or her education program**

For the purposes of this section 'unsatisfactory attendance' is defined as:

*Failure by a student to regularly attend at school during agreed times or participate in a meaningful manner in his or her planned education program.*

Unsatisfactory attendance of students of compulsory school age must be reported through the Single Referral Process via EDSAS or on form ED171, to a student attendance counsellor. It should be noted that the *Education Act 1972* provides for prosecution of parents/caregivers/guardians in certain circumstances for students who fail to attend at school. Individual circumstances will determine whether a prosecution will be considered under the Education Act.

### **Prosecution of parents/caregivers/guardians for the non-attendance of a child**

Section 76(1) of the Education Act states that a child of compulsory school age is required to attend the school at which she or he is enrolled on every day instruction is provided by the school for the child.

Section 76(3) states that where a child of compulsory school age fails to attend school each parent/caregiver of the child shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a penalty not exceeding five hundred dollars.

### **Habitual and Chronic Non-Attendance**

In order to assist schools to identify students at high risk DECD has established the following parameters:

- **Habitual Non-Attendance:** Where a student has 5 or more absences per term (average of 1 day per fortnight) then the issues of absenteeism for that student should be analysed by the school for possible chronic non-attendance
- **Chronic Non-Attendance:** Where a student is absent for 10 days or more per term (average of 1 day per week) then the issues of absenteeism for that school should be analysed for possible chronic non-attendance.

### **Mandatory Notification Responsibility in relation to Student Non-Attendance**

The *Children's Protection Act, 1993* requires DECD staff and volunteers to notify the Department for Families & Communities, through the Child Abuse Report Line (131478) if they suspect on reasonable grounds that a child has been or is being abused or neglected. This responsibility is part of the broad duty of care that staff and volunteers have towards the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Under the *Children's Protection Act 1993*, persistent non attendance at school is identified within the interpretation of "at risk" – Part 1, 6 (2) *the child is of compulsory school age but has been persistently absent from school without satisfactory explanation of the absence.*

In relation to the above, it is expected that DECD staff will have exhausted all avenues of early intervention/ family support and encouragement prior to making a report regarding non-attendance at school.

DECD provides clear processes for documenting and recording Mandatory Notifications including a pre-notification checklist, notification checklist and reporting proforma.

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/speced2/pages/childprotection/mandatoryNotification/>

### **Apparent illegal absentees observed by police or student attendance counsellors**

Police officers and student attendance counsellors are empowered to obtain a child's name and address and the reason for non-attendance if the child is observed in a public place in school time. If the child does not have a proper reason for being absent, only the Police Officer (not the student attendance counsellor) may take the child into his or her custody and return the child:

- To someone in authority at the school, or
- To a parent or guardian of the child.

If the child is accompanied by an adult, the police officer or the student attendance counsellor may inquire into the reason for the child's absence. Police officers and student attendance counsellors have the authority to call at a home at any time, to seek the following information:

- Full name(s) and age(s) of all children of compulsory school age living in the home
- The school(s) at which the children are enrolled

There is a formal *Memorandum of Understanding* between SA Police and DECD in relation to how police will fulfil section 80 of the Education Act. A review of this agreement was completed in 2003 and the protocol was re-signed in September

2003 by the Chief Executive and the Commissioner of Police. A copy of the agreement is available from DECD Child and Student Wellbeing. Although the powers conferred by the Education Act are substantial the police are to use the powers sparingly, giving consideration to the following:

- Time of day
- Age of child
- Circumstances where child located
- Ability of parents to take custody of a child
- Resources available for police to transport a child.

Police involvement will generally consist of:

- Talking to students not attending school who appear to be at risk of offending or causing a public nuisance
- Advising the school where the student is enrolled
- Advising the parent of the child
- Advising a student attendance counsellor of the details of a non-attending child.

### **Data security**

Attendance and enrolment data must be kept secure. Students and unauthorised persons must not have access to data. (Refer to Information Privacy Principles, Administrative Instructions and Guidelines Section 1:148).

### **Codes for absences**

Each absence must be recorded with a code to explain the reason for each absence.

The use of codes is essential to provide information about the reasons for nonattendance.

It is important schools record information with accuracy. Teachers need to follow up absences to ensure the code finally recorded reflects the accurate reason, especially for those absences initially recorded as unexplained (code U). As codes are updated and developed intermittently to record specific absences, sites should regularly check the updates provided on the DECD SSONet and make that information available to the site in order for all staff to continue to provide accurate absence data.

### ***Unexplained absences – code U***

The code used for unexplained absences is “U”. Teachers need to check absences recorded on EDSAS as “U”. Some codes need to be edited to another code when the teacher learns that there was an explained reason for an absence. Schools are particularly advised to look for patterns of consistent numbers of “U” which may indicate a problem with persistent habitual non-attendance that requires an intervention strategy or the assistance of a Student Attendance Counsellor. Regular absences with code “I” – illness or “F” – family should also be monitored as these can sometimes mask other issues affecting a student’s attendance.

### ***Codes to qualify absence***

**C Illness** with a day/s absence **verified by a doctor’s letter, doctor’s certificate, a dentist’s appointment card or some other health practitioner’s communication.**

**E Exemption** – approved exemption from school attendance by the principal (for up to one calendar month) or the Director, School and Regional Operations (for more than one month or for Home Schooling).

N.B. Students exempted for home schooling should be entered into a separate roll class set, and do not need to be marked absent.

**F Family/social** – for absences condoned by a parent as being for family, social or cultural reason.

**I Illness** with a day/s absence covered by notes, messages and phone calls from parents, stating a medical condition or illness preventing the student’s attendance.

**K Take Home** - Absence due to a student being sent home for disciplinary reasons.

**N Not approved** - Absent without parent/guardian approval.

**S Suspension** – Suspended externally from school to an agreed place, usually home. In the discipline screen of EDSAS, record the reason for the suspension, e.g. violence.

**U Unexplained** - a student who is absent without explanation by either: parent, school or another authority, e.g. Families SA

Use this code for unexplained absences of students both under and over the age of compulsion.

**Z School following up** - Students who are absent for an extended period of time but the school is in communication with, and actively following up to try to re-engage the student.

### **Student attendance validation procedures via EDSAS**

The Attendance Policy requires all DECD sites to record attendances/absences according to DECD requirements and to implement site procedures, including parent/caregiver information, to follow-up non attendance.

## **BASIC recommended TEACHER and school/preschool responsibilities**

### **Daily**

- Record student absence by an agreed time each morning;
- Under the Education Act it is a legal requirement for parents/caregivers to notify the school principal of student absences and the reason. Absence details are to be recorded daily;
- All reasons for absence provided by parents should be filed in the relevant class roll and kept with the roll sheet as a perpetual record;
- Any unexplained absences should be followed up directly with the parent/caregiver;
- Information in EDSAS should be updated/edited as soon as relayed to the school to provide a more accurate reflection of absences For example, an unexplained (U) absence may be changed once notified to the school by the parent/caregiver the reason for the absence;
- The "roll book" printout/absentee information booklet/sheet should be entered in EDSAS and returned to the teacher by a specified time each day.

### **End of each term**

- Teacher signs "roll book" print out at the end of term to validate students enrolled, left, transferred and student absences;
- Teacher returns the hard copy to the nominated person who will file for audit purposes as a legal requirement.

### **Prior to each census**

- The principal/nominee verifies accuracy of data as per Roll Class List/Roll Book/Print out, and student numbers at each year level and certifies reports;
- The teacher verifies individual student absences by using the report "Student absences totalled by Reason in Roll Class"
- The school is required to keep a hard copy of the Census information for audit purposes.