



Related Documents	Roll Marking Procedures Child Protection Policy Excursions Policy Enrolment Policy Student Wellbeing Policy
Policy Review	This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or as needed in line with legislative changes.
Implementation Date	June 2023
Last Review Date	June 2023
Constructed/ Reviewed by	St Philip's Christian College Cessnock on advice from Russell Kennedy Lawyers
Approved By	Matthew Connett (Principal)
Date	June 2023

Related Information and Templates

Appendix 1 - Guiding Questions and Next Steps
Sample Email Sent to Parent for Chronic Absenteeism 15 days
Sample Email Sent to Parent for Chronic Absenteeism 30 days
AISNSW Compulsory School Attendance – Information for Parents and Carers
Sample Letter – Deputy Principal to Parent Advising of Intention to Meet to Develop an Attendance Improvement Plan
Sample Letter – Principal to Parent Advising of Secretary's Compulsory Schooling Conference
Sample Letter – Principal to Parent Advising of Further Action
Sample Letter – Principal to Parent Advising of Court Ordered Compulsory Schooling Conference
Student Attendance Improvement Plan Template
Graduated Attendance Improvement Plan Template
Return to School Rubric
External Support Services Information and Consent Form
Principal's Leave Form
Attendance Exemption - Elite Sports and Arts Exemption Application

1 General Statement

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock (the **College**) is committed to the success and wellbeing of all students. Daily attendance at school is important for students to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind socially or developmentally.

School participation and attendance:

- maximises life opportunities for students by providing them with education and support networks;
- helps students develop important skills, knowledge and values that set them up for further learning and participation in their community; and
- contributes to students' academic success and helps them develop habits of punctuality, self-discipline and responsibility.

The *Education Act 1990* (NSW) (the **Act**) sets out requirements for enrolment and attendance of students at school in New South Wales. While there are some exceptions, generally speaking, children of compulsory school age (6 – 17 years) are required to be enrolled in, and attend, school or be registered for home schooling.

Under the Act and the NSW Education Standards Authority (**NESA**) registration requirements, independent schools are responsible for monitoring, recording, and following up student absences as well as implementing intervention strategies to improve student engagement and school attendance. The College is committed to acting in accordance with its legal obligations and requirements regarding school attendance.

Accordingly, this policy sets out the College's expectations and processes regarding student attendance and absences.

2 Aim

The College strives to;

- ensure that all students of compulsory school age who are enrolled at the College attend every school day;
- ensure students, staff and parents have a shared understanding of the importance of attending school;
- explain to staff and parents the procedures that the College has in place to:
 - support, monitor and maintain student attendance; and
 - record, monitor and follow up student absence.

3 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy:

- **Compulsory school age** means a child who is of or above the age of 6 years and below the minimum school leaving age.
- **Minimum school leaving age** means the age which a child completes Year 10 of secondary education (unless an exception applies) or the age of 17 years, whichever occurs first.

4 Attendance Procedures

The College's procedures for monitoring attendance include:

- Maintaining a register of enrolments.
- Roll marking in accordance with the College's Roll Marking Procedures and promptly recording attendance in the College's online management system TASS.Web
- Monitoring the attendance of each student enrolled at the College at least once per day
- Identifying and recording all absences using TASS.Web. Absences are then notified to the Sub School Reception and cross checked at least twice daily against absentee notifications that have been provided to the College that day.
- Following up on any unexplained absences of a student in accordance with this policy.
- Notifying parents and guardians regarding poor school and/or class attendance.
- Processing applications for exemption from attendance or enrolment.
- Recording information regarding a student's unsatisfactory attendance at the College

5 Roles and Responsibilities

The various roles and responsibilities are outlined in the table below.

Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide clear information to staff, students and parents regarding attendance requirements and consequences for unsatisfactory attendance• Ensure the College has effective procedures to monitor and follow up student absence• Ensure staff are trained to implement the College's attendance policies and procedures (which includes this policy)• Ensure that attendance and enrolment records are maintained in an approved format and are an accurate record of the attendance and enrolment of students
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that attendance data is monitored and chronic absence if followed up appropriately • Ensure strategies are developed to ensure regular school attendance • Follow procedures for approving and granting a student's absence from the College • Provide support to the Deputy Principal regarding chronic absence and Attendance Improvement Plans • Refer serious matters regarding student attendance to the relevant authorities <p>The Principal has the authority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve student absences in circumstances where a reasonable explanation is provided by the student's parent(s) for the absence • Accept or reject explanations for a student's absence (and internally record the reasons for this decision) • Grant a student an exemption from attending the College (including for periods totaling up to 100 days in a 12-month period for any one student, provided certain conditions are met) • Maintain records of all certificates that exempt a compulsory school age student from attending the College
Deputy Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information to staff, students and parents regarding attendance requirements and consequences for unsatisfactory attendance • Promote regular attendance at the College • Support staff when dealing with parents regarding chronic absence • Meet with parents should student attendance fail to improve or become a concern • Determine appropriate course of action and interventions to be put in place • Liaise with relevant specialists and external agencies • Liaise with the Head of School and other key staff if the student needs to be placed on an Attendance Improvement Program • Coordinate the reporting of students at risk to the relevant authorities • Keep the Principal informed of serious attendance issues and strategies being implemented
Heads of School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear information to staff, students and parents regarding attendance requirements and consequences for unsatisfactory attendance • Promote regular attendance at the College • Regularly monitor attendance data and follow up chronic absences • Support staff when dealing with parents regarding student attendance • Ensure that attendance concern emails are sent to parents and followed up • Meet with parents should student attendance fail to improve or become a concern

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine appropriate course of action and interventions to be put in place • Liaise with relevant specialists and external agencies • Ensuring staff record information on a student's file on MySPCC in PC Entries under Welfare Notes, each time information is provided about a student's absence (particularly in the event that the explanation is not deemed to be reasonable) • Liaise with the Deputy Principal if the student needs to be placed on a College Attendance Improvement Program • Use the mandatory reporter guide (Keep them Safe) to determine risk of harm and report any suspicions of significant harm to Communities and Justice Child Protection Helpline on 13 2111
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote regular attendance at the College • Accurately record student attendance following the <i>College's Roll Marking Procedures</i> • Monitor student attendance and follow up absences (including in accordance with this policy) • Record information on a student's file on MySPCC in PC Entries under Welfare Notes, each time information is provided about a student's absence (particularly in the event that the explanation is not deemed to be reasonable) • Discuss attendance concerns with students, parents and appropriate staff members • Assist in determining appropriate course of action and interventions to be put in place
Wellbeing/ Learning Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in determining appropriate course of action and interventions to be put in place • Discussions with relevant staff, student (and family) • Complete Re-entry Plans for a student's return to campus following an extended absence
Sub School Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote regular attendance at the College • Record, monitor and maintain accurate attendance records • Inform the Head of School of frequent Late Arrival/Early Departure and/or absence • Support staff when dealing with parents/caregivers regarding student attendance • Notify class teacher if a student leaves early or if they will not be in class • When required, contact parents regarding absence • Disseminate information to staff regarding student absence

Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure their child of compulsory school age is enrolled in, and attending school (unless the child has been accepted for an exemption or is registered for home schooling) • Ensure their child attends school every day that the College is open for attendance, and arrives on time • Ensure their child attends every activity of the College (including attendances at an approved educational course) that the College requires the child to attend • Provide a reasonable excuse to the College for their child's absence on any particular school day. Notification may be provided via email or by telephoning the College and should be made prior to the start of the school day. Reasonable excuse for a student's absence from the College might include (but is not limited to): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ illness, including recovery from major illness, injury or medical condition; ○ medical or dental treatment; ○ bereavement; ○ religious or cultural observation; or ○ family holidays or attended visits overseas. • Work in partnership with the College to resolve any attendance issues • Seek permission and submit a Principal's Leave Form and any relevant supporting material at least two weeks prior to the required dates • Otherwise act in accordance with their obligations under the Act regarding their child's attendance at school
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend school every day and participate in all classes/excursions/activities as directed by the College • Be punctual to all classes and activities • Seek assistance from staff if there are any issues affecting their attendance • Senior students are required to make alternative arrangements with the Director of Studies regarding NESA assessment tasks if absenteeism prevents them from completing set tasks on time

6 Following Up Student Absences

It is essential to maintain connection with young people and their families. This also improves the success rate of maintaining high attendance and reducing chronic absence/school refusal. Accordingly, the College adopts the following strategies when following up on student absences:

The general procedure for dealing with student absence is set out in the table below:

Day of absence	Where an absence has not been explained, an SMS text message is forwarded to the student's parent by the end of Period 1, notifying them of the absence and requesting that they reply with a specific reason for this absence.
5 days absent	The student's PC Teacher and/or the Year Leader will contact the student's parent (try phone at first instance, then follow up by email) to express concern about the absence if a reasonable excuse is not provided. Staff are required to record any information shared by the student's parent on the student's file in MySPCC in PC Entries under Welfare Notes.
15 days absent	The student's parent will receive an email from the relevant sub school office to express concern about the student's extended absence. Where appropriate, the Head of School will request that the student and their parent/s attend a meeting with the Year Leader and Learning Support/Wellbeing staff member/s. The purpose of this meeting will be to further understand the student's absence, offer support and complete a Student Attendance Improvement Plan. If appropriate, the College will complete an Attendance Improvement Plan and consider the need for a re-entry meeting prior to the student's return to campus.
20 days absent	The College will repeat the process outlined above (for 15 days absent).
30 days absent	The student's parent will receive an email from the Executive Assistant's office to express concern about the student's extended absence. The College will request that the student and their parent/s meet with the Deputy Principal (or their delegate) and other relevant staff to offer support and review the student's Attendance Improvement Plan. Subject to the circumstances, the College will likely encourage the family to seek professional wellbeing and support services for the student (which may include a Mental Health Plan, if appropriate). The Head of School will notify the Deputy Principal of the student's extended absence.
40 days absent	The College will repeat the process outlined above (for 30 days absent).
50 days absent	The College will request that the student and their parent/s meet with the AIS Consultant and other relevant staff to offer support and review the Student Attendance Improvement Plan. Subject to the circumstances, the College will likely encourage the family to again seek professional wellbeing and support services for the student (which may include a Mental Health Plan, if appropriate).

7 Attendance Improvement Strategies

Attendance Improvement Plan

The Attendance Improvement Plan (**AIP**) is used to broadly identify the specific barriers prohibiting the student from attending the College (for example: school refusal, school withdrawal, or truancy), and outlines strategies to address those issues.

As a general rule, a student's AIP is reviewed fortnightly, but at a minimum monthly.

All areas of school life should be considered as part of the AIP planning process. These may include strategies to:

- facilitate a gradual transition to school that builds up to full-time attendance and is achievable, plan what the student will be doing, where and with whom;
- manage expectations regarding completion of schoolwork and assessments;
- ensure a key contact person is established for a regular check-in/check-out;
- have a student-friendly 'safe place' to go to if needed (eg subschool Reception or Wellbeing Team);
- access appropriate external specialists;
- address any additional needs that the student may have (which may involve the College seeking permission from a student's family to liaise and consult with the student's care team and/or appropriate external mental health services or providers);
- support social engagement and interactions with peers as part of the re-entry to school process; and
- facilitate communication processes between the student, their family and the College.

Once the AIP has been developed, follow up communication is sent to the student's family, attaching a copy of the AIP, along with the actions to be undertaken and the nominated review date. Where appropriate, the AIP may also be shared directly with the student concerned.

General Strategies

Some of strategies utilised by the College to improve a student's engagement and attendance may include:

- Discussions with the student and their parent regarding reasons for poor attendance and implementing strategies to support the student in improving their attendance and enhancing their engagement at school.

It is preferable that meetings are conducted face to face, however in rare cases, the College may exercise its discretion and allow this meeting to be conducted remotely (eg. via phone, Zoom or Teams).

Parents need to be aware that if proceeding remotely, it may be difficult for the College to accurately gauge a student's (and their family's) understanding of the absenteeism, the plan to facilitate the student's return to work and level of commitment required to reduce the attendance concerns.

- An Attendance Improvement Plan (see above)
- A Graduated Increase Attendance Plan

This plan outlines variations to a student's timetable and may include conditions on a student's enrolment as they transition back to on-campus learning. The nature of the plan is that the student's attendance and participation in all aspects of the College gradually increases as time goes on (and that the student's engagement with school simultaneously increases).

- A Return to School Rubric

This rubric focuses on particular areas of concern that are impacting on the student's attendance and level of engagement at the College and can be tailored to their needs.

- Secretary's Compulsory Schooling Conference

On some occasions, despite undertaking the attendance improvement planning process and allowing time to monitor and review the agreed strategies, a student's attendance may not improve. In these instances, more formalised actions may proceed. The Act provides for the implementation of compulsory schooling conferences, compulsory schooling orders and ultimately prosecution.

8 Factors Influencing Attendance

A variety of complex, interrelated factors influence student absenteeism.

Non-attendance has a variety of effects on students, both academically and socially and can include social isolation (including alienation), a lack of engagement with the school community and peers, and leading to emotional and behavioural difficulties. The effects of non-attendance on achievement are cumulative and can impact both academic achievement and attendance in future years of schooling.

An understanding the complex interactions between these factors is crucial to addressing problematic attendance and optimising outcomes for all students.

Individual Factors

Individual factors that influence student absenteeism relate to student's attitudes and motivations. The individual factors that are most likely to predict a student's non-attendance include;

- Academic self-concept and self-esteem – negative beliefs about academic abilities and feeling academically inadequate

- Not feeling safe at school – being the victim of bullying
- Depression and anxiety
- Lack of connectedness to school and peers – lack of ‘belonging’
- Negative attitudes towards teachers
- Lack of motivation or goals
- Disliking school, boredom, pursuit of other activities outside school

Family Factors

The level of respect that a family has for their child’s education, the extent to which parents are seen as a role model for their child and parental attitudes can shape a child’s attitudes to attendance at school.

Family involvement, in the form of support with homework and academic progress, active monitoring of attendance and participation in the school community, can increase a student’s engagement and achievement at school.

Correspondingly, a lack of such parental involvement can have negative effects on student attendance. Instability and conflict in the home also predict students’ non-attendance. If parents do not value education and are not involved in their child’s schooling, students may adopt similar attitudes, which might inform their decisions about whether to attend the College.

College Related Factors

The College environment can also influence a student’s decisions about attendance. At the College, all students have a right to learn in an environment where they feel safe, happy and supported, and which is underpinned by the College’s paramount commitment – student safety.

However, if, for example, a student perceived a ‘climate of tolerance’ for bullying or racism at the College (which for the avoidance of doubt, is not condoned or tolerated), they may not feel safe to attend. A sense of belonging to the College community is also an important factor related to absenteeism. A lack of belonging or connectedness to the College may be characterised by poor relationships with teachers and conflict with peers or ostracism from peer groups.

An “ikigai” is a “reason for being”, according to Japanese tradition. In order for a student to be motivated to overcome their fears and the challenges surrounding school, it is important that they have clear “reasons for being” at the College. An ikigai draws on a child’s natural passions and strengths, and create both present and future purpose, through establishing ways their strengths and passions can be needed and valued at school, and later, in the wider world. A school-based ikigai can act as a key anchor for a young person’s sense of confidence, competence, self-esteem, and belonging in the College’s environment, and provides a natural path towards career aspirations and longer-term goals.



9 Exception from Compulsory School Attendance

All students enrolled at the College are expected to ensure their attendance accords with this policy and any other policies and procedures implemented by the College unless the student is exempt from attendance from enrolment or attendance.

Parents are required to seek an exemption if they wish for their child (who is of compulsory school age) not to participate in compulsory schooling (at any school, and not just at the College) for a period of time.

Grounds for exemptions may include:

From enrolment:

- age (in certain circumstances for children turning 6, but not exceeding 6 months after the child's 6th birthday).
- students who have completed Year 9 but not yet completed Year 10 and who have secured a full-time apprenticeship or traineeship.

From attendance:

- exceptional circumstances.
- direction under the *Public Health Act 2010*.
- employment in the entertainment industry.
- participation in elite arts or elite sporting events.

A child may be exempt from attending the College if the Minister for Education (or their delegate) is satisfied that conditions exist which make it necessary or desirable. The Principal of the College has delegated authority by the Minister for Education to grant exemptions in some circumstances. Parents are required to make an application for exemption to the College in advance of the period being sought.

Please know that exemptions from compulsory school attendance cannot be granted retrospectively.

10 Records of Enrolment and Attendance

The Principal has a responsibility to ensure that records of all enrolments and attendance are made in accordance with the Act and the guidelines set out by NESAs, and kept in a form approved by the Minister for Education and Communities.

The electronic register of enrolments includes the following information for each student:

- name, age and address;
- the name and contact telephone number of parent(s)/guardian(s);
- date of enrolment and, where appropriate, the date of leaving the College and the student's destination;
- for students older than six (6) years, previous school or pre-enrolment situation; and
- where the destination of a student below seventeen (17) years of age is unknown, evidence that the Department of Education has been notified of the student's full name, date of birth, last known address, last date of attendance, parents' names and contact details, an indication of possible destination, other information that may assist officers to locate the student, and any known work health and safety risks associated with contacting the parents or student.

The electronic register of attendance includes the following information for each student:

- daily attendance, which may be recorded by noting daily absences;
- absences;
- reason for absence (including for example, if a student has written permission from the Principal to attend a course with an external provider such as a TAFE); and
- documentation to substantiate reason for absence.

All or part of the records pertaining to enrolment and attendance are available for inspection by an authorised person on request.

The College will retain:

- each register of enrolments for a minimum period of five (5) years before archiving.
- each register of daily attendances for a period of seven (7) years after the last entry was made.



Guiding questions for school and family

- What are the strengths, interests and aspirations of the student?
- What are the barriers for the student in attending school full-time?
- What supports and strategies need to be put in place to ensure the student can attend school for the whole school day and who is best placed to implement these proactive strategies?
- What is the pattern of attendance for siblings who may be enrolled at the school?
- Does the student have underlying health conditions?
- Does the student have a disability or learning difficulty? What impact does this have on social and academic participation at school?

If there is a known mental health issue, or there is evidence of an emerging mental health concern, the school should seek consent from the family to liaise/consult with appropriate external mental health services or providers. It is the information provided by specialist mental health care experts that will guide the attendance expectations and strategies discussed as part of the planning process.

Guiding questions to clarify involvement of external specialist

- Are there any external specialists involved with the student?
- What type of support is the external specialist currently providing the student?
- How often do they see/interact with the student?
- Is the external specialist available to participate in or provide input to the attendance planning process?

Next Steps

Following the meeting, it is important to monitor the student's attendance closely.

Depending on the progress, there are a few possible ways in which the case may proceed:

- If the student and parents/carers have meaningfully engaged with the attendance plan, there has been improvement in some of the student's attendance and there is agreement between all parties involved that the matter will be resolved, it would be reasonable in this instance to extend the period of the Attendance Improvement Plan. A graduated return should be maintained first, before increasing the attendance expectations.
- Provide positive encouragement and feedback to the student, acknowledging their effort via rewarding the target behaviour of attending school as per the expected plan.
- Any new strategies would be negotiated in consultation with the student, parents and school personnel and documented as part of the updated plan.
- If there is limited improvement as per the Attendance Improvement Plan, a review meeting may be convened earlier than previously arranged.