



St Philip's Christian College Cessnock Attendance Policy

DOCUMENT INFORMATION

The College policies are written in accordance with the requirements set out in Section 47 of the *Education Act* and NESA requirements for school registration.

Throughout this document, parent includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child, including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

Supervisor	Matt Connett
NESA Information	<p><i>Registered and Accredited Individual Non-Government Schools (NSW) Manual</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 3.6 - Safe and Supportive Environment • Section 3.8 - Attendance • Section 3.10 - Educational and Financial Reporting <p>https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/regulation/school-registration/registration-and-accreditation-individual-non-government-schools-manual</p> <p>https://rego.nesa.nsw.edu.au/registered-individual-non-government-schools/registration-requirements/attendance</p>
Legislative Requirements	<p>NSW Education Act 1990 https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/whole/html/inforce/current/act-1990-008</p> <p>Children and Young Persons (Care and Protections Act 1998) Sect 23 http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/caypapa1998442/s23.html</p> <p>The Ombudsman Amendment (Child Protection and Community) Act 1998 http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/num_act/oapacsa1998n148609/</p> <p>National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2017L01182</p>
Related Documents	<p>Attendance Guidelines and Procedures</p> <p>Roll Marking Procedures</p> <p>Child Protection Policy</p> <p>Excursions Policy</p> <p>Enrolment Policy</p> <p>Student Wellbeing Policy</p> <p>AISNSW Guide to School Attendance Requirements and Attendance Improvement Planning – Advice for NSW Independent Schools</p> <p>AISNSW Compulsory School Attendance – Information for Parents and Carers</p> <p>aitsil Spotlight – Attendance Matters</p>
Policy Review	This policy will be reviewed every 3 years, or as needed in line with legislative changes and the requirements of the NSW Association of Independent Schools.
Implementation Date	January 2022
Review Date	January 2025



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1. General Statement

The NSW Education Act (1990) (Education Act) sets out requirements for enrolment and attendance of students at school in NSW. Children of compulsory school-age are required to be enrolled in, and attend, school or be registered for home schooling (section 22 of the Education Act). In NSW, the compulsory school age is from the age of 6 to 17. However, a child under the age of 17 ceases to be of compulsory school age if they have completed Year 10 and are enrolled in approved education or engaged in training, or paid work (or a combination of these) on a full-time basis (an average of 25 hours per week) (section 21B of the Education Act). The Education Act includes provision for the exemption of students from enrolment or attendance in certain circumstances.

Under the Education 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.

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock is committed to the success and wellbeing of all students. Daily attendance is important for students to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind socially or developmentally. School participation maximises life opportunities for students by providing them with education and support networks. School helps students develop important skills, knowledge and values that set them up for further learning and participation in their community. Daily school attendance contributes to students' academic success and helps them develop habits of punctuality, self-discipline and responsibility.

Students enrolled at St Philip's Christian College Cessnock are expected to attend school during normal school hours every day of each term unless they have an approved exemption. Staff and parents have an important role to play in supporting students to attend school every day. Students are expected to attend every school day, arrive on time and be prepared to learn. They are encouraged to approach a teacher and seek assistance if there are any issues that are affecting their attendance.

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock parents are expected to commit to ensuring their child/children attend on time every school day. Parents are encouraged to communicate with the relevant staff about any issues affecting their child's attendance and work in partnership with the school to address any concerns. Parents must provide a reasonable explanation for their child's absence from school and endeavour to schedule family holidays, appointments and other activities outside of school hours wherever possible.

2. Aim

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock strives to;

- ensure that all children of compulsory school age who are enrolled at St Philip's Christian College Cessnock attend every school day
- ensure students, staff and parents/carers have a shared understanding of the importance of attending school
- explain to staff and parents the procedures St Philip's Christian College Cessnock have in place to
 - a) support, monitor and maintain student attendance
 - b) record, monitor and follow up student absence

3. Responsibilities of Parents

Legally, it is the responsibility of the parent of a child of compulsory school age, not the school, to ensure that their child is enrolled in, and attending school, or is registered for home schooling (section 22 of the Education Act). Once enrolled, children are required to attend school each day the school is open. It is an offence under the Education Act (section 23) if a parent does not meet the legal obligation in relation to the enrolment and attendance of their child(ren) at school or registration for home schooling.

4. Responsibilities of the School

Schools and Principals have legal obligations in relation to attendance under the Education Act and NESAs' school registration requirements. St Philip's Christian College Cessnock has policies and procedures for school registration that address the following responsibilities in relation to attendance:

- maintaining registers of enrolments and daily attendance
- recording and monitoring daily attendance/absence of students
- following up student absence
- processing applications for exemption from attendance or enrolment
- monitoring attendance data
- implementing intervention strategies to improve unsatisfactory attendance

4.1 Following up Student Absences

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock follows up unexplained absence with parents, notifies them regarding poor attendance and maintains records of unsatisfactory attendance.

The Principal has the discretion to decline a reason provided for an absence if he/she is not satisfied with the reason provided or do not think the absence is in the best interest of the student. The Principal can request parents provide documentation to substantiate the reason for the absence.

If a reason for an absence has not been provided within the designated time period from the date of the absence, or has not been accepted by the Principal, St Philip's Christian College Cessnock will record the absence as unexplained or unjustified. Even where an absence is recorded as unexplained, the school will continue to follow up the reason for the absence with parents.

4.2 Exemption from Attendance or Enrolment

Under section 25 of the Education Act, students may be eligible for an exemption from enrolment or attendance in accordance with the Exemptions from Attendance and Enrolment – Guidelines for Independent Schools. Grounds for exemptions may include:

- exemption 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
- exemption 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 school if the Minister for Education (or delegate) is satisfied that conditions exist which make it necessary or desirable. Independent school principals have been delegated authority by the Minister for Education to grant exemptions in some circumstances. Parents are required to make an application for exemption to the school in advance of the period being sought, with the exception of an exemption under the Public Health Act where no application is required.

4.3 Intervention strategies

St Philip's Christian College Cessnock implements whole school, proactive strategies designed to support student learning and engagement in school that leads to regular school attendance. We implement targeted intervention strategies to identify and support students at risk of developing attendance concerns. Some of the strategies include;

- Ensuring processes and policies are clear
- Contacting the student's parent
- Establishing a pattern of regular communication with the parent
- Liaising with the Pastoral Care, Learning Support and Student Wellbeing Teams
- Following up with Executive staff
- Liaising with external specialists and agencies

5. Attendance Improvement Strategies

Attendance improvement planning is a collaborative process whereby issues relating to a student's inability to attend school are identified and strategies to increase attendance are determined. An Attendance Improvement Plan is the documented outcome of the planning process.

At St Philip's Christian College Cessnock, attendance improvement planning involves collaboration between the student, parents, teacher/s and other school personnel. It may also include external support professionals such as psychologists, therapists and pediatricians.

Some of the attendance improvement strategies the College may implement include;

- Discussions with the student and their parent regarding reasons for poor attendance and implementing strategies to support the student in improving their attendance
- An Attendance Improvement Plan
- A Graduated Increase Attendance Plan
- A Return to School Rubric
- 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 Education Act provides for the implementation of compulsory schooling conferences, compulsory schooling orders and ultimately prosecution.

If satisfactory attendance is not achieved following implementation of an Attendance Improvement Plan, then a Compulsory Schooling Conference may be convened. AISNSW has authorised conveners who can conduct Compulsory Schooling Conferences on behalf of independent schools. The Compulsory Schooling Conference is the final school-based intervention that can be taken to address matters of unsatisfactory school attendance. Conferencing:

- assists families to address poor school attendance without recourse to 'legal action'
- is part of a conciliatory process meant to identify issues impacting on school attendance
- develops strategies around poor school attendance
- is intended as a pre-court process to support families in restoring attendance before further legal action considered

6. Child Wellbeing and Child Protection Concerns

School attendance issues can occur in the context of child wellbeing and child protection concerns and may occur as part of a picture of other concerns related to parenting vulnerabilities potentially leading to child abuse and neglect.

The NSW Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporters Guide (MRG) identifies attendance concerns under the Neglect Concern – Education: Habitual Absence. The MRG decision tree for educational neglect refers to situations where a ‘child/young person is of compulsory school age AND is habitually absent’. Habitually absent is described as a minimum of 30 days absence within the past 100 school days. Other factors may warrant action to report earlier than the 30 days indicated (Keep Them Safe: A shared approach to child wellbeing, 2009-2014). If the College is concerned that a student may be at risk of significant harm, the school will follow the mandatory reporting procedures regardless of how many days the student has been absent. If there are concerns the child is not enrolled and there are Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) indicators the MRG would also allow for reporting under the Neglect Concern - Education (not enrolled).

St Philip’s Christian College Cessnock will follow our child protection policy and procedures where there is a concern that a student may be at risk of significant harm and will refer to the NSW Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporters Guide (MRG) and/or contact the AISNSW Child Protection team for further advice.

7. Definitions of Absenteeism

St Philip’s Christian College Cessnock recognises that it is important to clarify the multifaceted nature of school absences by differentiating the various terms that are often used interchangeably and to delineate the different terms as they represent different behaviours and motivators. Kearney (2008) defined absences as the following categories:

- Absenteeism – defined as any form of absence from school or class
- School refusal – refers to when a child or young person refuses to attend school and/or has problems remaining in class for an entire day and is anxiety-based (e.g. separation, generalised or social anxiety driven). It can present as extended absences from school, periodic absences from school, missed classes or chronic tardiness with the child or young person experiencing intense dread (or anxiety) about school that precipitates pleas for future non-attendance. Parents/carers are aware of school refusal absences and no attempt by the child is made to conceal these absences.
- Chronic school refusal – defined as missing 15 school days in an academic year or missing at least 10% of school days at some point of the academic year.
- Truancy – refers to concealed absences by the child or young person, without parents’ knowledge. Truancy is not anxiety-based and usually involves the child or young person engaging in alternate behaviours.
- School withdrawal – refers to when parents/carers deliberately keep a child away from school for various reasons including family illness, parental conflict or family holidays.