

Victor Harbor Primary School

Attendance Policy & Improvement Plan



Research shows that attendance at school all day and every day positively affects learning, wellbeing, employment and life outcomes for children and young people. Learning is cumulative and it is disrupted if students miss school often.

School attendance and the law

Attendance at school is compulsory. The Education and Children's Services Act 2019 states that all children must attend school from 6 until they turn 17. This could be in a school or an approved learning program.

Parents or legal guardians (carers) can be prosecuted if they do not make sure their child goes to school. This can mean being fined or getting a criminal conviction.

The Department's attendance policy

The South Australian Department for Education's [Attendance Policy](#) guides the responsibilities of the whole school community to make sure that children and young people attend school. This includes school staff, parents, carers and students.

Schools work with their community to develop positive attendance habits. This starts from the earliest years. They do this when they provide a safe, inclusive and culturally respectful environment. They use effective and consistent local practices to monitor and manage absences. Students are more likely to want to come to school and achieve if they feel:

- included
- valued
- respected
- supported

Our school's vision

All students have a right to an education. This gives them the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

We have a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment where students can learn and grow. Each student is engaged in their learning. Parents and carers are important partners in this process.

We keep a check on any students who might fall behind. We work with parents, carers and students to find out why someone is missing school. We provide supports that are specific to each student's needs.

Students at risk from missing school

Students can be away from school for many reasons. Schools use categories to identify children and young people at risk. The [attendance policy](#) defines the following groups of students as at risk because of how often they miss school.

- **Habitual non-attendance:** a student has 5 to 9 days absent in a term for any reason.
- **Chronic non-attendance:** a student has 10 or more days absent in a term for any reason.

For students in these groups, we assess the level of risk to their learning and wellbeing. When a student is at risk we will talk with the family about the issues. We make sure that appropriate follow up and support is provided.



How we implement the Department's attendance policy

Our attendance practices align with the department's attendance policy.

We support student attendance when we:

- promote the importance of education from the earliest years of life and throughout school
- assess patterns of non-attendance and develop ways to address this
- actively engage and include all children, young people and their families
- provide support to address the barriers to attendance, learning and wellbeing
- monitor attendance to make sure progress is documented and supports are in place
- evaluate the need for further or ongoing support and referral for additional support.

We use data to create our attendance improvement plans. This is in partnership with our community. Our plan includes the actions we will take to make sure all students can attend school.

Victor Harbor Primary School's attendance expectations

School starts at 8.50am each day and finishes at 3.10pm.

A parent/carer is required to provide an explanation if their child is late or has to leave early. All students must give this to the front office when they sign in or out.

Attendance responsibilities

Everyone has a role to make sure students attend school all day, every day.

Students

- Attend school every day the school is open unless they are ill or have an approved exemption.
- Arrive at school and to all lessons and activities on time.
- Participate positively in all learning activities.
- Report to the front office if they arrive late or leave early. A parent or carer might be contacted.

Note: a student's age and circumstances affect the level of responsibility.

Parents and carers

- Make sure their child attends school every day the school is open, unless they are ill or have an approved exemption.
- Be responsible for their child's travel to and from school.
- Make sure their child arrives at school on time, between 8.20am and 8.50am.
- Provide their child's school with up-to-date contact details.
- Provide a reason to the school if their child is absent, late or leaving early. The same day if possible.
- Provide a medical certificate or written explanation if their child is ill for 3 or more days in a row.
- Make appointments outside of school hours if possible. For example, dentists or National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers.
- Monitor their child's attendance and classwork. Help their child to meet deadlines and catch up if needed.

Teachers and leadership team

- Make sure all parents and carers are aware of attendance expectations, policies and procedures.
- Accurately record each absence, late arrival or early departure with the appropriate code.
- Contact parents or carers if there is no explanation for an absence, or a pattern of absences.
- Document contact with parents and carers about absences, including attempts to contact.
- Request a medical certificate from parents or carers if needed.
- Consult with the local Student Support Services if needed. For example Social Work, Truancy.
- Make notifications about chronic non-attendance (via the Child Abuse Report Line – [CARL](#)) guided by Responding to Abuse and Neglect – Education and Care ([RAN](#)) training and the [Mandatory Reporting Guide](#).
- Make sure the list of absences and late arrivals are given to the front office each day as early as possible.
- Front office staff will contact the parent or carer on the day their child is absent, for example by text message.

Authorisation of exemptions

In some circumstances, the principal has authority to approve an exemption from school. This can be for up to 1 month. It can also be for up to 12 months for a family holiday.

Before asking for an exemption, families should talk to a site leader. Students must attend school until an exemption is approved.

Our school requires an exemption for absences more than 5 school days in a row. This does not include illness.

Parents or carers must apply in writing. The principal will advise them in writing of their decision. A copy is kept in the student record folder. Exemption forms are available from the front office.

Exemptions of more than 1 month (excluding holidays) must be approved by the department's central office.

Note: Exemptions are counted as student absences from school

Attendance Improvement

Absence Follow up

This is an overview of how VHPS follow up student absences. A quick follow up helps us to manage risks early and reduce absences. These steps may be adapted to fit in with family needs and/or circumstances.

1. If a student is absent from school, their absence is recorded, along with the reason given by the parent or carer.
2. If we receive no reason, the school will follow up with the parent or carer. This is usually done via phone or text (SMS).
3. After 3 days of non-explained absences teachers will attempt to contact families (minimum of two times) via phone or Class Dojo. Attempts to contact families will be recorded on Sentral.
4. If the attempts to contact the family were unsuccessful or absences continue the teacher will notify the Student Wellbeing Leader.
5. If absences continue or there are concerns raised by the absence, the SWL will attempt to contact the family to follow up further.
6. This follow up contact could include a ***phone call, meeting request or letter home*** depending on the severity of the issue. SWL will speak to the family about the importance of attendance and offer support to avoid referral to Truancy. SWL will help support the family to look at and address any issues or barriers that may be stopping the student from coming to school, we will also connect the family to other services if needed.
7. Appropriate staff (SWL/PCW/ACEO) may also conduct a Home visit if there are continued concerns.

8. If there are no improvements and it becomes a case of chronic non-attendance, a referral to truancy will be made. A phone referral can be made by the teacher, SWL or Leadership and a Record of Consultation will be created, with recommendations and an action plan.
9. If the student continues to be absent and the family are not engaging and haven't responded to the contact that has been made SAPOL can be contacted to conduct a welfare check.
10. Mandatory notifications can also be made by staff as required:
 - Parent/Carer refusal to send their child to school or engage with any other education options available (e.g. Open Access or Home Schooling).
 - Continued refusal of offers of support or attempts to help the family to overcome barriers to attendance.
 - A family have disengaged.
 - The child's education has been seriously interrupted by patterns of non-attendance that are enduring or ongoing in nature.

Our data

Our student attendance records help us to plan how we improve school attendance. We routinely analyse data, both whole school and individual student attendance.

Table 1 shows our attendance data for 2018-2021.

Year level	2018	2019	2020	2021
Reception	89.5%	88.7%	88.1%	89.9%
Year 1	91.8%	88.8%	88.4%	90.0%
Year 2	91.1%	89.8%	89.8%	89.7%
Year 3	90.7%	91.1%	88.5%	89.8%
Year 4	93.2%	89.7%	90.6%	89.3%
Year 5	91.3%	90.5%	89.2%	90.6%
Year 6	90.9%	91.6%	89.1%	88.9%
Year 7	88.1%	92.2%	89.1%	88.4%
Total	90.4%	90.0%	88.6%	89.0%

Our approach to improving attendance

At Victor Harbor Primary School our attendance strategies are guided by the South Australian Department for Education's attendance policy.

We will plan, implement and review the following attendance improvement actions. We will do this with our governing council, staff, students, families and local community.

Promote

We will promote the importance of education from the earliest years of life and throughout the schooling years as a school community priority of the highest value.

Our actions

- Communicate why going to school every day matters. Explain how absences affect learning, wellbeing and future success.
- Set up attendance expectations. Share this with families. Lead by example.
- Include information about student attendance in school reports.

Assess

We will assess patterns of non-attendance and circumstances. We will use this to inform the development of appropriate targeted, intensive and coordinated interventions.

Our actions

- Record daily absence. Make sure it is recorded correctly. Import the data into the department's reporting system (EDSAS or EMS).
- Set up a process for quick and consistent recording and follow up of all absences.
- Analyse attendance data for trends and patterns of absence.
- Review attendance data with staff. Discuss students at risk.
- Check on all students who have habitual and chronic non-attendance. Find out what support they might need.

Engage

We will actively engage and include all children, young people and their families in education and interventions which support attendance.

Our actions

- Create a welcoming and inclusive school.
- Engage and challenge students. Allow for different student abilities and needs. Modify the curriculum and teaching practices if needed.
- Build relationships with parents and carers. Offer different activities over the year.
- Set up programs that support student wellbeing and school connections.
- Support students to build resilience.
- Support students to develop relationships.
- Build staff skills to provide an inclusive, relevant and engaging curriculum.
- Support students identified as habitual and chronic non-attenders as early as possible. This might include home visits.
- Encourage staff to talk with families and students about attendance.
- Create safe and supportive learning spaces. This is so all students can learn and engage.
- Involve students in the design and delivery of their learning.
- Build student voice into school decision-making.
- Ask students and staff for feedback about the learning environment.

Support

We will provide support to address the barriers to attendance, learning and wellbeing. We will make sure there is inclusive support for children and young people so they can be physically present and engaged in education.

Our actions

- As early as possible, support students who have attendance and wellbeing issues.
- Work with Student Support Services on student attendance issues.
- Set up attendance improvement or learning plans for students with attendance issues.
- Work with families to find out why students are away from school. Make sure the support fits their individual needs.
- Support Aboriginal students with attendance issues. Make sure the support fits the student's individual and cultural needs.
- Support children and young people in care with attendance issues. Make sure the support fits the student's needs.
- Support students with disability who have attendance issues. Make sure the support fits the student's needs.
- Set up a process to follow-up attendance issues that students and families tell us about.
- Set up supports when there are big changes in a student's life. Support students to plan for their education needs now and in the future.

Monitor

We will monitor attendance to make sure that risks are identified, supports are in place, and progress is monitored.

Our actions

- Set up an attendance team. This team can identify, check on and lead support for students with attendance issues.
- Check on students we are supporting. Share how the student is going with their family.
- Make sure staff understand their duty of care to check on and follow up attendance issues.
- Set up ways for staff to escalate attendance issues.

Evaluate

We will evaluate the need for further or ongoing interventions, referrals for external support and mandatory notifications.

Our actions

- Work with the Social Worker - Truancy for extra attendance support.
- Connect families to external services for support.
- Train staff and volunteers in mandatory reporting of attendance issues.
- Keep in contact with families of students who have attendance issues.
- Work with local community groups and agencies to support students to go to school.

Communication and Review

- Consultation, discussion and sharing amongst teachers, students and parents via various communication channels was undertaken when developing this policy.
- This policy was ratified by the Victor Harbor Primary School Governing Council **16/08/22**
- The policy can be accessed via the school office or website.
- The policy will be reviewed **biennially, review date August 2024**