Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools

Attendance Policy for MACS Schools

1. Introduction

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Ltd (**MACS**) is a company limited by guarantee established in 2021 by the Archbishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne to assume the governance and operation of MACS schools across the Archdiocese of Melbourne. MACS subsequently established Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd (**MACSS**) to provide educational services to children with diverse needs and Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools Early Years Education (**MACSEYE**) to provide early years care and education services.

The Statement of Mission in the MACS Constitution, and the constitutions of its subsidiaries, MACSS and MACSEYE, sets out the Archbishop's expectations of Catholic schooling in the Archdiocese and provides an important context and grounding for the company and the direction which the MACS Board must always observe in the pursuit of the company's objects.

The Board must ensure that all policies and procedures concerning the operations of MACS, and its subsidiaries are consistent with the Statement of Mission and company objects, as well as any directions issued by the Archbishop from time to time.

2. Background

In accordance with the *Education Training and Reform Act 2006* (Vic) (the Act) and the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.), (the ETR Regulations), school attendance is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption from attendance and/or enrolment has been granted in accordance with the Exemption from School Attendance and Enrolment processes.

Whilst Parents and Carers have legal responsibility for ensuring their child attends school, fostering consistent attendance is a shared commitment among Parents and Carers, students, MACS schools, and the broader community. Regular school attendance plays a vital role in supporting positive educational, health, and social and emotional growth and experiences alongside fostering essential support networks and relationships outside of a child's core family. When students engage positively and consistently with their schooling through regular attendance, it expands the students' life opportunities by strengthening the likelihood of longer-term educational, work, economic, health and wellbeing outcomes, particularly after school completion.

3. Purpose

To ensure MACS schools:

- adopt a shared, evidence-informed and trauma-informed approach to promoting, supporting, and sustaining regular student attendance.
- maintain accurate and rigorous attendance records, ensuring every enrolled student is accounted for every school day.
- implement mandated procedures for recording and reporting non-attendance in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

4. Scope

This policy applies to MACS schools, including specialist schools operated by MACS subsidiary, Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Specialist Schools Ltd (MACSS) and school boarding premises operated by MACS schools (MACS schools). It also extends to school-provided online environments and digital devices used in connection with MACS schools.

This policy also applies to volunteers, casual relief staff, Parents and Carers.

5. Principles

Guided by Ministerial Order 1359, the Victorian Child Safe Standards, *The Act*, the *ETR Regulations*, our Catholic faith and the MACS Vision for Engagement and Vision for Instruction position statements, the Attendance Policy is based on the following principles:

- every student is inspired and enabled to flourish and enrich the world (*MACS 2030*).
- student engagement is central to learning improvement, as articulated in the MACS *Vision for Engagement*. Consistent attendance is critical for academic achievement and students' sense of belonging, connection and self-efficacy.
- strong and positive partnerships with families and school communities support regular attendance and engagement by creating inclusive environments where respect, wellbeing, and student voice are promoted through clear and consistent practices.
- strategies are developed that actively engage students, address barriers to attendance, and provide clear, supportive pathways for families experiencing attendance-related challenges.
- transparent procedures are applied for recording absences, setting thresholds for intervention, and communicating with families. Consistent, fair expectations and a shared understanding among the school community of attendance and engagement promote wellbeing, growth and success for every student.
- a culture of belonging is cultivated where every student and their family feel accepted, valued and supported, contributing to improved attendance and engagement.
- attendance data is monitored regularly to identify patterns and initiate early intervention to connect families and students with support services and prevent long-term disengagement.
- early intervention is prioritised by knowing students well; recognising subtle signs of disengagement, responding proactively to changes in attendance, and tailoring support to individual needs before concerns escalate.

6. Policy requirements

Schooling is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years. Students are expected to attend the school in which they are enrolled. This includes participation in school-approved activities such as offsite learning activities during normal school hours, every day of each term, unless the student:

- has an approved exemption from school attendance and enrolment
- has an agreed temporary modified timetable arrangement
- has dual enrolment with another school
- is registered for home schooling, as approved by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA), and has a partial enrolment in a school for particular activities.

Parents and Carers have a legal responsibility to:

- enrol their child of compulsory school age in a registered school
- ensure their child attends their education program unless formally exempted
- promptly notify the school of any student absence not covered by an exemption
- provide the school with up-to-date contact details, including emergency contacts.

These responsibilities, shared by both schools and Parents and Carers, must be carried out in alignment with the Enrolment Policy and associated procedures.

6.1 Recording and monitoring requirements

The Principal must establish and document clear procedures for recording and monitoring student attendance. This includes maintaining a student attendance register that records attendance and notes any unexplained absences. These procedures must comply with legislative requirements and must follow the Recording and Monitoring School Attendance Procedures, ensuring the school's duty of care toward students.

The Principal must ensure that attendance is recorded:

- twice per day in primary schools
- for every class in secondary schools
- in accordance with requirements for registered school boarding premises, where applicable.
- when students attend off-site premises for approved school learning activities that form part of their education program. This includes, but is not limited to, partnership arrangements such as Vocational Education and Training (VET), camps and excursions and other school-approved activities.

In addition to ensuring accurate attendance recording, the Principal is responsible for overseeing that:

- the reason for each student's absence is appropriately documented
- Parents and Carers are notified about school attendance concerns in a timely manner
- attendance records are accurately maintained within student files
- current contact details for all Parents and Carers, including emergency contacts, are kept up to date
- staff members responsible for monitoring and managing student attendance are clearly designated.

6.2 Attendance and Census Eligibility

Attendance must reflect a student's active engagement in their study of school subjects received as part of their primary or secondary education. In alignment with the Non-government Schools Census Guide, students are only eligible to be reported in the school's census if their primary or secondary education program of study includes school subjects (from Foundation to Year 12) that contribute to their curriculum-based learning program. This is only one of several eligibility requirements. To be eligible to be counted in the census, students must:

- be enrolled at the school on census day
- enrolled in a year level the school is approved to provide at that location
- has a pattern of regular attendance at the school, or at school generally during the year
- have attended the school for at least one day during the census reference period.

Further information on student eligibility and ineligibility for census reporting is available in the Non-Government Schools Census.

6.3 Senior Secondary Students

MACS schools must comply with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority's (VCAA) requirements for attendance and scheduled classroom time for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM) and Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), as outlined in the relevant VCAA Administrative Handbook. This includes minimum class time, managing school-based assessment absences and identifying breaches of attendance rules. MACS schools should implement early intervention strategies and Special Provision arrangements for eligible students who may be in need.

7. Tiered system of supports to attendance

MACS schools implement an evidence-based, tiered system of supports to attendance (e.g. the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework). This approach enhances academic learning, positive behaviour, and overall wellbeing for all students.

MTSS provides a consistent framework across MACS schools, integrating *Vision for Instruction* and *Vision for Engagement*. The MTSS is underpinned by five essential elements:

- multi-level prevention system
- evidence-based teaching practices
- universal screening and targeted assessment
- data-based decision-making
- progress monitoring.

By enabling identification of attendance concerns, tiered support practices allow for timely and targeted interventions that strengthen engagement, wellbeing and educational outcomes. MTSS practices must be implemented with fidelity, sustained over time, and aligned across the three domains: academic, behaviour and health and wellbeing.

8. Roles and reporting responsibilities

Role	Responsibility	Reporting requirement
Principal	Ensure implementation of the Attendance Policy for MACS Schools and associated procedures.	Annual attestation to the Executive Director.
Principal	Establish and apply school processes to record and monitor student attendance, including follow-up of absences in accordance with MACS Attendance Policy and recordkeeping standards.	Attendance recorded twice daily for primary students or every lesson for secondary students, as mandated by The Act; follow up unexplained absences on the same day.
Principal	Notify the Department of Education (DE) when a student has five days of unexplained absences or when enrolment/attendance exemptions apply.	Notify the DE by completing the Referral Form – Unexplained-Absence and forwarding it to the relevant Senior Manager, School Leadership (SMSL) for notification. Follow all guidance regarding enrolment/attendance exemptions.
Principal	Document and review modified timetable arrangements and attendance support plans.	Notify relevant regional office when a student is placed on a modified timetable.
Principal and School Leaders	Coordinate targeted support for students whose school attendance indicates emerging or persistent needs.	Submit all Student Engagement Unit consultation requests via the Record of Student Adjustment and Evaluation (ROSAE) application on CEVN and maintain case-notes.
School Staff (all)	Apply school processes consistently to monitor, record and support student attendance.	

9. Procedures

Procedures to implement this policy are published separately. Principals are required to adapt and develop school-based processes for monitoring school attendance using the *MACS Recording and Monitoring School Attendance Procedure* template. These processes must incorporate the *Responding to Absence Process* and establish appropriate referral pathways through MACS.

A separate procedure must be followed for the implementation, reporting and monitoring of Modified Timetables, supported by the relevant documentation.

10. Definitions

Definitions of standard terms used in this Policy can be found in the Glossary of Terms.

Attendance

A student is considered to be attending school when they are onsite at their enrolled school, engaged in MACS-approved remote learning, or participating in an offsite curriculum program or activity organised by the school – such as excursions or camps. A student is also considered to be in attendance when they are engaged in a re-engagement program or attending another school part-time to make up full-time attendance. In these cases, attendance is recognised when time fractions – each of which must not exceed a total of 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) – have been agreed between the schools or settings, allocation of funding (if appropriate) has been determined, and a Personalised Learning Plan is in place and endorsed by all relevant parties.

In the context of the senior secondary years of education attendance also includes:

- vocational education and training (VET) delivered at a technical and further education institution (TAFE), registered training organisation (RTO) or another school or provider
- structured workplace learning (SWL) or work experience undertaken in industry settings
- school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) as part of approved student learning programs.

Dual enrolment

Dual enrolment refers to an arrangement where a student is enrolled in two educational settings (registered schools) simultaneously, with a combined enrolment equating to 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).

Dual enrolment is a formal arrangement that supports students with disability or additional learning needs to attend both a mainstream school and a specialist school at the same time. This can also refer to other arrangements, such as attending mainstream school while also taking subjects through the Virtual Schools Victoria (VSV). This arrangement is designed to give students access to a broader range of educational experiences and support services.

Dual enrolment **does not** include a combination of home education/schooling and enrolment at a MACS school.

If a family determines that an enrolment below 1.0 FTE is more appropriate for their child, they must ensure the remaining FTE is fulfilled through enrolment at another registered school such as a specialist or special assistance school.

When entering into a dual enrolment agreement, several considerations must be addressed. These include the enrolment processes at both schools, the provision of updated assessments and documentation from relevant specialists, and the clear allocation of attendance days across each setting. The duration of the dual enrolment, transition and orientation arrangements, and the communication and reporting protocols between schools and families must also be established. Additionally, both schools must work collaboratively to identify the student's learning needs and ensure reasonable adjustments are in place to support their educational access and engagement.

Exemptions

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic) (the Act) allows exemptions from school attendance and enrolment to be granted in specific circumstances. An exemption from school attendance and enrolment may be granted under:

- *Ministerial Order 705: Exemption from school attendance and enrolment* to participate full-time in approved education, training and/or employment.
- *Ministerial Order 713:* where a child will turn six (compulsory school age) while attending kindergarten.
- *Ministerial Order 714: Exemption to allow employment in the entertainment industry* if the student is employed or seeking employment during school hours in the entertainment industry.

- *Ministerial Order 715: Exemption from school attendance and enrolment* if leaving school is in the best interests of the student.

Refer to the Department of Education (DE) Exemption from school attendance and enrolment guidance for further information.

Modified timetable

A temporary, time-limited (maximum of 10 consecutive school weeks), flexible arrangement developed in partnerships between the student and their Parents or Carers, with consultation from the student's Program Support Group members. It allows for adjustments to the student's daily schedule to support their learning, wellbeing, or transition needs.

Multi-tiered system of supports

A three-tier framework to support intervention at increasing levels of intensity (AERO 2024a).

Regular attendance

Regular attendance is defined as attendance for at least 80% of the time the student is enrolled at the school in the current year.

Partial enrolment

Partial enrolment is a combination of school and home education. It allows a child who is registered by the VRQA for home education to attend a registered school for specific subjects or activities.
This arrangement enables families registered by the VRQA to combine home education with formal school-based learning.

Students cannot complete the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM) or the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC) via a home education/schooling arrangement.

Students who are registered by the VRQA for home education **can** be partially enrolled in a MACS school, subject to determination by the MACS Director, Education Excellence and the Chief of Regional Operations. Parents and the Principal will work together to determine the nature of the partnership and whether partial enrolment in a MACS school is a suitable option for the student and the school.

School attendance concerns

School attendance concerns refer to patterns of problematic absenteeism and can be reliably differentiated into three key types:

- **Truancy:** Truancy is said to occur when:
  (1) a student is absent from school for a whole day or part of the day, or they are at school but absent from the proper location (e.g., in the schoolyard rather than in class); and
  (2) the absence occurs without the permission of school authorities; and
  (3) the student typically tries to conceal the absence from their Parents and Carers.
- **School refusal:** School refusal is said to occur when:
  (1) a student is reluctant or refuses to attend school and shows signs of emotional distress. This distress may be short-term (e.g., fear, temper tantrums, unhappiness, unexplained physical symptoms) or chronic and ongoing (e.g., depressive affect; sleep problems). These feelings often lead to absences, which might include late arrivals, missing whole school days, missing consecutive weeks or longer; and
  (2) the student isn't trying to hide their absence from their Parents and Carers (they are usually at home, and the parents/carers are aware of this). If they previously hid the absence in the past, they stopped doing so once the absence was discovered; and
  (3) the student does not display severe antisocial behaviour, beyond resisting their Parents and Carers' attempts to get them to school; and
  (4) the Parents and carers have made reasonable attempts – now or in the past – to get the student to attend school, and/or they express their intention for the student to attend school full-time.

- **School withdrawal:** School withdrawal is said to occur when:
  (1) a student is absent from school (e.g., late arrivals; missing whole school days; missing consecutive weeks, months, or years); and
  (2) their absence is known to their Parents and Carers and not hidden; and
  (3) the absence is either due to the Parents and Carers actively keeping the student at home, or because the Parents and Carers have made little or no effort to support their return to school.

  (Hayne et al 2018).

School Attendance Officers

In the context of attendance, DE School Attendance Officers are empowered through The Act to issue School Attendance Notices, School Enrolment Notices, and Infringement Notices. Refer to DE Infringement notices guidance for further information.

Special provision for attendance (senior secondary years of education)

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) Special Provision policy ensures students whose learning and assessment are affected by disability, illness, impairment or other circumstances, are given the most appropriate, fair and reasonable options to demonstrate their capabilities.

Prolonged absence from school or study is not in itself grounds for Special Provision. However, provisions are available to students experiencing severe hardship that may result in prolonged absence. Upon application from the student, and with supporting evidence, the school may grant Special Provision for classroom learning and school-based assessment. In such cases, students must not be penalised for reduced physical attendance, provided the school has approved alternative arrangements.

Refer to the VCAA Special Provision page for more guidance.

Student engagement

Encompasses attendance, behaviour, belonging, learning, mental health and wellbeing, and motivation.

Engagement supports students to feel a sense of belonging and purpose as a learner. It encompasses students' behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement – essentially, how students behave, feel and think as they undertake learning activities. The influence of teachers is pivotal to students' engagement (AERO 2023a).

Engagement is different for each student. It will not look the same for all students or be replicated in each classroom in the same way (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris 2004).

Unexplained or unapproved absences

A Principal can approve or not approve any absence based on the requirements of the Act an individual school policy or on a case-by-case basis.

The Act provides some examples of what a reasonable excuse is for the purposes of explaining a school absence and includes, amongst other considerations:

- illnesses and accidents
- unforeseen and unexplained circumstances
- if the absence was a result of complying with another law
- the child is receiving distance education through a registered school
- the child is undertaking approved education, training and/or employment during school hours
- the child has been suspended or negotiated transfer/expelled
- the child is attending or observing a religious event or obligation.

A Principal will record an **absence as unexplained** if no explanation about the absence is given to the school by the Parents and Carers of the student.

Related policies and documents

Supporting documents

Attendance Support Plan
Modified Timetable Arrangement plan
Modified Timetable Procedure
Recording and Monitoring School Attendance
Procedure Student Absence – Guidelines for MACS Schools
Responding to Student Absences – Process for MACS Schools

Related MACS policies and documents

Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
Child Safety and Wellbeing Procedures
Child Safety and Wellbeing Recordkeeping Procedures
Duty of Care Policy
Enrolment Policy
Pastoral Care of Students Policy
Privacy Policy
Student Behaviour Support Policy
Student Behaviour Support Procedures
Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures

Resources

Department of Education and Training (Vic) School attendance guidelines
Department of Education and Training (Vic). Exemption from School Attendance or Enrolment
Department of Education and Training (Vic). Seven attendance improvement strategies
Department of Education and Training (Vic). Student Engagement Policy Guidelines
MACS Attendance and Engagement: CEVN webpage
Victorian Early Leaver Connection Initiative | vic.gov.au
Public Record Office Victoria Recordkeeping Standards
Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) VCE Administrative Handbook 2025
Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) VPC Administrative Handbook 2025

11. Legislation and standards

Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic.)
Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.)
Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth)
Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
Ministerial Order 705 – Exemption to participate full-time in approved education or training and/or employment
Ministerial Order 714 – Exemption to allow for employment in the entertainment industry
Ministerial Order 715 – Exemption if leaving school is in the best interests of the child
Ministerial Order 1359 – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Premises

Policy information

Responsible director	Director, Education Excellence
Policy owner	Chief of Student Services
Approving authority	Executive Director
Assigned board committee	Child Safety and Risk Management
Approval date	11 February 2026
Risk rating	High
Date of next review	February 2029

Publication details	CEVN, MACS website, school website
POLICY DATABASE INFORMATION	
Assigned framework	Care, Safety and Welfare of Students
Supporting documents	Refer to the list of supporting documents
Superseded documents	Attendance Policy – Schools – v4.0 – 2023 Attendance Policy – Schools – v3.0 – 2022 Attendance Policy – Schools – v2.0 – 2022 MACS Attendance Policy – v1.0 – 2021