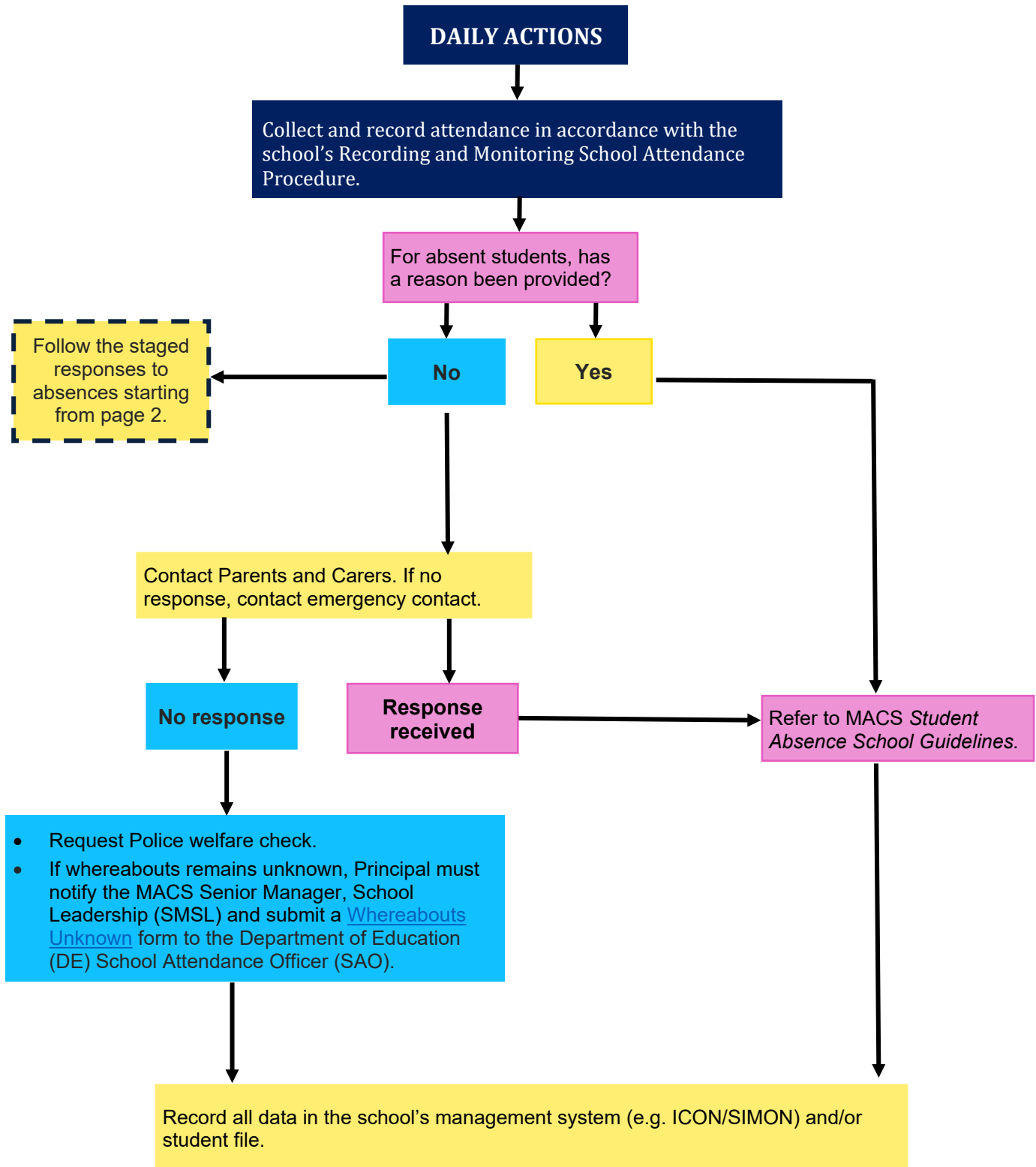


Responding to Student Absences

Process for MACS schools



Melbourne Archdiocese
Catholic Schools



Non-problematic absenteeism

Non-problematic absenteeism is short-term or long-term absence that is agreed on by Parents and Carers and school officials as legitimate in nature and not involving detriment to the child. It may be caused, for example, by illness, religious holidays, natural disasters, and the education during the absence can be supported by work completed at home.

Problematic absenteeism

Problematic absenteeism is defined as a 2-week period of:

1. having missed at least 25% of total school time;
2. experience severe difficulty attending classes with significant interference in a child's or family's daily routine; and/or

In addition to the above 2-week criteria, a student may also be considered to have problematic absenteeism if they are absent for 10 or more school days within any 15-week school period (equivalent to at least 15% of school days).

Note: Even when absences are marked as "excused," frequent excused absences can still indicate serious underlying issues. These patterns may mask school attendance concerns. School attendance concerns are complex, and staff are required to respond to all absences, in accordance with MACS Policies.

Staged Response to Absences

Strong, positive partnerships between schools, families and communities are essential to supporting regular attendance and engagement. Parents and Carers are the primary partners in a child's education, and working together ensures inclusive environments where respect, wellbeing and student voice are promoted through clear and consistent practices.

Stage 1: One day of unapproved or unexplained absence

Required

- See daily actions
- Send reminder notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Sample Reminder Notification).
- If no response to above, after three days, send notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Stage 1 Sample Notification) and keep a copy on file.

Considerations

- Provide Parents and Carers support where required.
- If the absence follows a pattern of other concerning behaviours, consider further interventions.
- To comply with the Child Safe Standards, schools should consider any additional circumstances and supports that may be required for students who may experience vulnerability.

Stage 2: Three to five days of unapproved absences

Accumulated over a 12-month period

Required

- See daily actions
- Communicate concerns of problematic attendance with the staff allocated as per the schools Recording and Monitoring School Attendance procedures.
- Send notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Stage 2 Sample Notification) and keep a copy on file.

Considerations

- Choose a staff member who the student trusts to do a wellbeing check-in.
- Allocate a staff member as case manager to investigate the student's circumstances, e.g. from student, relevant school staff, Parents and Carers, other students, etc. Recommendation to use Understanding the potential causes of student absences – Template for MACS Schools.

Stage 3: Five days or more of unapproved absences

Accumulated over a 12-month period

Required

- See daily actions.
- Send notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Stage 3 Sample Notification) from a relevant leadership staff member, requesting Parents and Carers attend a care team meeting.
- Escalate the concern to the allocated case manager from Stage 2 to ensure consistent communication

Considerations

- Consider internal support that may exist (e.g. pathways and transitions/careers teacher, school counsellor, etc).
- Consider having a PSG with relevant key stakeholders involved with the student's attendance.
- Consider a secondary consultation or direct intervention from local services, (e.g. CAMHS, Victoria Police Community Liaison Officer. Etc.)

between all parties (e.g. care team members, mentor, Parents and Carers, the student).	• Liaise with any existing family service/seek support for family where necessary, (e.g. The Orange Door, etc.). • Consider if a ROSAE referral may provide additional support to school staff. • Consider if Stage 6 would be beneficial at this point, noting that all requirements must be met before the Department of Education (DE) considers sending the Unexplained Absence notification. In some cases, it may not be appropriate to request this from DE at this stage, as there are additional supportive actions yet to be taken.
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Stage 4: Ongoing unapproved absences

Required	Considerations
• See daily actions. • Send notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Stage 4 Sample Notification) from the Principal. Send a copy via registered mail. Parents and Carers are required to respond within seven days. • Arrange a PSG with the student, Parents and Carers and relevant staff (school and external) to investigate underlying causes of absenteeism and to develop and implement an Attendance Support Plan. • Complete a referral to Record of Student Adjustment and Evaluation (ROSAE) (if not already active), for school attendance concerns. • Alert the SMSL for their awareness.	• Following the PSG, consider updated secondary consultation and external referrals (if not already in place), e.g. Child and Youth Mental Health Services (CYMHS), Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), The Orange Door, Navigator, etc. • Continue to liaise with any existing family service or seek support for family. • Continue to support the student's education through a Personalised Learning Plan (PLP) and/or an Attendance Support Plan. • Consider whether there is any educational benefit to a modified timetable. • Explore potential for age-appropriate flexible learning options or re-engagement programs at a school level or in the community. • Consider if Stage 6 would be beneficial at this point, noting that all requirements must be met before the Department of Education (DE) considers sending the Unexplained Absence notification.

Stage 5: Unresolved ongoing unapproved absences

Required	Considerations
• Principal to continue discussion with the SMSL regarding the student and family circumstances and audit of school efforts/strategies implemented to re-engage student. • SMSL will determine if additional MACS services may be of support/if any. • Continue to liaise with external support organisations or programs.	• Ensuring the wellbeing of school-based staff is considered as this can be an emotionally challenging process. • Consider if access to EAP or staff wellbeing at MACS services may be appropriate.

Stage 6: Referral to the Department of Education (DE) School Attendance Officer (SAO)

Referring a student attendance matter to the DE SAO may be appropriate where the Principal, in consultation with the SMSL, determines that:

- intervention strategies have been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in an alternative educational program).
- requiring the Parents and Carers to respond to the notice will convey the seriousness of the matter and is likely to elicit an improvement in attendance.

If the decision has been made to make a referral to the DE SAO, the Principal must:

- complete the [Referral Form – Unexplained-Absence](#) and forward it to the SMSL for notification.
- send notification to Parents and Carers (e.g. Stage 6 Sample Notification) to advise that the matter has been escalated to the DE SAO.

- continue to record, monitor and respond to absences as per the school's requirements until notification from the SAO indicates otherwise.

Principals should be certain they have adequate evidence to demonstrate the Parents and Carers have not been meeting their responsibilities under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* before making a referral to the DE SAO.