



Student Absence

Guidelines for schools

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with the *Attendance Policy for MACS Schools* and *Responding to School Absences Process*. As with all absences, they are recorded at the Principal's discretion, considering the circumstances of the child and their family and balancing the legislated requirements for recording attendance in accordance with the *Education Training and Reform Act 2006* (Vic.) (the Act) and the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic.).

Identifying Absenteeism

It is important for school staff to determine whether absenteeism is **problematic** or **non-problematic**.

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 student. 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 in which a student:

1. has missed at least 25% of total school time;
2. experiences severe difficulty attending classes, with significant interference in a student's or their 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). This supports early intervention for students whose sporadic absences are still of concern.

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.

1. A student who is participating in one of the following activities must be recorded as not physically present at the school site but will not be considered absent from school:

	Reason	A student will not be considered absent when:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
1.1	School activity	They are participating in an activity organised by the school that takes place on the school grounds but is outside their regular classroom program (e.g. assemblies, school-based celebrations or ceremonies, sports day held on campus, etc.)	Yes	N/A	Yes	Attendance to be taken as per normal school day.	N/A
1.2	Camps and Excursions	They are participating in activities organised by the school where students are taken out of school grounds (e.g. day excursion or school approved event).	Yes	N/A	Yes	As above	Refer to the MACS Excursions, Camps and Travel Policy .
1.3	Off campus educational activity	They are participating in an educational activity that is part of their curriculum and is away from the school campus. These activities may include participation in a course delivered at a TAFE, other training provider or at another school as part of their school learning program. These activities may be regular and ongoing in nature.	Yes	N/A	Yes	As above	N/A
1.4	Approved remote learning	They are attending school remotely via a model of remote learning that has been authorised by the MACS Director, Education Excellence.	Yes	N/A	Yes	As above, pending authorisation by the MACS Director, Education Excellence.	N/A
1.5	Natural disaster	They are unable to attend school due to an extreme weather event or other natural	Yes	N/A	Yes	N/A	N/A

	Reason	A student will not be considered absent when:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
		disaster. This code may be used whether or not the student is continuing with schoolwork while absent from school and may be used for full or part-day absences.					
1.6	Work experience	They are participating in a Work Experience Arrangement approved by the school in accordance with Ministerial Order 1413 . Schools must ensure the Work Experience Arrangement Form (and other relevant Work Experience forms) are completed and signed before commencing.	Yes	N/A	Yes	Specific attendance procedure to be in place for all work experience.	N/A
1.7	Structured workplace learning	They are participating in a Structured Workplace Learning Arrangement approved by the school in accordance with Ministerial Order 1412 . This is an accredited course of study they are undertaking (i.e. the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) study VCE Industry and Enterprise, the VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM), the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC), or Vocational Education and Training (VET)). Schools must ensure the Work Experience Arrangement Form (and other relevant Work Experience forms) are completed and signed before commencing.	Yes	N/A	Yes	Specific attendance procedure to be in place for all structured workplace learning.	N/A
1.8	School-based Apprenticeship or Traineeship	They are participating in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship (SBAT). This is for students enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), the VCE Vocational Major (VCE VM) or the Victorian Pathways Certificate (VPC).	Yes	Yes (via the Training Plan signed by the school).	Yes	Specific attendance procedure to be in place for all SBATs.	N/A
1.9	Modified timetable	The Principal, student, and parent/carers agree to a modified timetable arrangement,	Yes	N/A	Requires Principal	Use the Modified	Yes, as per the Modified

	Reason	A student will not be considered absent when:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
		developed in partnership with the Program Support Group (PSG), for a limited period of time. This period must not extend beyond 10 consecutive school-weeks.			approval and Parents and Carers consent.	Timetable Arrangement Plan and Attendance Support Plan to assist.	Timetable Procedure.

2. Approved absence:

In the following circumstances absences will be considered reasonable where an explanation has been given:

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
2.1	Acute, short-term illness	The student is unwell (e.g. cold, flu) and unable to participate in learning or may pose a risk of infection to others. Parents and Carers should provide the school with an explanation for the absence, in line with the school's agreed processes for notifying of student absence.	Yes	No, MACS does not mandate medical certificates for student absences. However, schools have policies requiring them for extended absences. See your school's attendance procedures for further information.	Yes	If a student is absent for a period longer than 10 consecutive school days, ensure regular contact is in place to maintain school connection and ease the return to school transition' and /or consider notifying SMSL.	Yes, monitor for patterns. If it becomes a pattern, it may be part of a school attendance concern.
2.2	Ongoing or Significant medical or health conditions	The student has an ongoing or significant medical or health condition severe enough to impact regular attendance or participation in school, such as: - Conditions requiring extended treatment or recovery (e.g., chemotherapy, major surgery rehabilitation)	Yes	Yes – documentation from medical or health professionals.	Yes	A Medical Management Plan and/or Student Health Support Plan from a medical health professional must be used to guide necessary adjustments when the student	Yes, regular review of Medical Management Plan and/or Student Health Support Plan. Consider if the student should be placed on a modified timetable if appropriate.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
		Serious or progressive health conditions that temporarily prevent attendance (e.g., advanced illness episodes)				is on the school site.	
2.3	Infectious or contagious disease	When the student is affected by, or belongs to a group subject to, a public health direction or order relating to an infectious or contagious disease or condition. Parents and Carers should provide the school with an explanation for the absence, in line with the school's agreed processes for notifying of student absence.	Yes	No	Yes	For a small number of infectious diseases, a medical certificate needs to be provided before student returns to school. For more information visit the Department of Health's School Exclusion Table .	No
2.4	Medical /dental / allied health treatments or procedures	To attend a medical /dental /allied health appointment that cannot be made outside school hours. This should be documented through the provision of a written or verbal explanation from the Parents and Carers.	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve at Principal's discretion if appointments cannot be made outside school hours or are ongoing.	Consider if medical or health plans are required.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
2.5	Special event (e.g. competition)	To attend an external event (e.g. sporting competition, spelling bee, art presentation, etc.) that is not a school-approved activity or event. Principals should use their professional judgement to determine if it is reasonable for a student to be absent from school to participate.	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve at Principal's discretion	No
2.6	Suspension	For the duration of the Suspension, as per the Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures.	No	N/A	As per the Grounds for Suspension, outlined in the Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures.	Approve at Principal's discretion. Please refer to the Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures.	Yes, as per the Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures.
2.7	Bereavement	To attend a funeral or attend to Sorry Business or Sorry meetings. There may also be circumstances where a student is kept out of school due to grief of a close family member. In such circumstances, the	Yes	No	Requires Principal approval	Approve	Offer and provide support as required.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
		school should work with families to encourage them to have the student attend school to maintain a sense of normalcy. These situations should be handled with respect and sensitivity and should be underpinned by the interests of the student.					
2.8	Legal	Where the student is required to attend court or fulfil other legal requirements.	Yes	No	Yes	N/A	No, unless absences become excessive. Offer and provide support as required.
2.9	Holiday	To attend a holiday. However, Principals should use their professional judgement in determining whether a holiday is a reasonable explanation for a student absence, taking into consideration family circumstances, distance to be travelled, length and frequency of holidays. A Principal has the delegated power to grant an exemption from the requirement of attendance at a school where the	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve if Parents and Carers notify the school in advance. School procedures should include clear processes for managing requests for extended, frequent, or repeated holidays.	Student Absence Plan developed as per school procedures. Consider transition back into school after the holiday.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
		exemption will apply for less than one school year. Parents and Carers should be encouraged to plan holidays for students during school holiday periods and pupil free days.					
2.10	Religious or Cultural Observance	When the student is required to take part in a recognised religious or cultural observance. This also includes First Nations students attending cultural events such as Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, National Sorry Day, etc.	Yes	No	Yes	N/A	No
2.11	Family Violence	If a student or family member has disclosed that they are experiencing family violence, or a staff member has been made aware by authorities or external support agencies that are assisting the family.	Yes, consider notification may come from DFFH or Victorian Police	Yes	Yes	Approve and consider mandatory reporting requirements.	Yes, to ensure safety and offer support. Follow MARAM guidelines to offer support.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
2.12	Caregiving	If a student is a recognised young carer of a family member with a disability, physical or mental illness, substance dependency, or who is aged. *A carer is an agreed role the student has taken on as a necessity in their household, not to be used for one off babysitting or similar duties.	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve at Principal's discretion if discussed prior and education support is in place.	Yes, to ensure educational wellbeing support and investigate community supports for the family.
2.13	Exemption for attendance – Entertainment industry employment	If the student is employed in the entertainment industry and their application is approved by the Principal in accordance with Ministerial Order 714. Approved application to be submitted to MACS via eav@macs.vic.edu.au	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve at Principal's discretion via application.	Submit copy of application to MACS.
2.14	Same-day Response including Extension to the Same-day Response	For the duration of the Same-day Response or the Extension to the Same-day Response.	No	N/A	Requires Principal approval. Consultation with the MACS SMSL must be undertaken	Approve at Principal's discretion. Please refer to MACS Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of	Yes, as per the Suspension, Negotiated Transfer and Expulsion of Students Procedures.

	Reason	It is reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	Parent/ carer approval	School to confirm authenticity	Acceptable reason	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
					for an Extension to the Same-day Response.	Students Procedures.	
2.15	School refusal	When a student is reluctant or refuses to attend school and shows signs of emotional distress. The student isn't trying to hide their absence from their Parents and Carers (they are usually at home, and the Parents and Carers are aware of this). The Parents and Carers have made reasonable attempts – now or in the past – to get their student to attend school, and/or they express their intention for the student to attend school full-time.	Yes	Yes	Requires Principal approval	Approve if Parents and Carers and the school are working on a plan to address the cause and re-engage the student.	Yes, schedule meetings to address the underlying causes. Recommendation developing an attendance support plan. Consider whether a modified timetable would provide any educational benefit for the student.
2.16	Other	When the Principal has approved the absence at their discretion, where it does not meet the above criteria. A record must be kept explaining why the Principal has permitted the absence.	Yes	N/A	Requires Principal approval	Approve at Principal's discretion	As advised by Principal

3. Unapproved absence:

The following circumstances will be considered absences for which there is NOT a reasonable explanation given:

	Reason	It is NOT reasonable for a student to be absent from school:	General advice for Principals	Follow up required
3.1	Unexplained absence	When no explanation for a student absence has been offered to the school, within 10 days, by the Parents and Carers, or the student if they are a mature minor.	Principals must ensure school-based procedures follow the MACS Responding to Student Absences Process, prioritising the safety of the student.	Yes, refer to Responding to Student Absences Process.
3.2	Leisure activities	When undertaking a personal or leisure activity, including but not limited to shopping, celebrating birthdays, attending events, visiting friends and relatives.	These activities should not be approved during school hours, see 2.9 for advice on holidays.	Monitor for patterns.
3.3	Any other reason for absence	Unless the Principal determines the reason is acceptable, using professional judgment to assess explanations provided by the Parents and Carers or the student if they are a mature minor. The Principal should consider other school attendance concerns such as school withdrawal, where students are: - absent from school; and - their absence is known to their Parents and Carers and not hidden; and - the absence is either due to the Parents and Carers actively keeping the student at	If the reason does not align with the approved reasons above, Principals should use discretion and inform the student's Parents and Carers that their reason for absence is NOT APPROVED and will be recorded as such.	Monitor for patterns and provide supports if required.

home, or because the Parents and Carers have made little or no effort to support their return to school.

If the reason given is not a reasonable explanation the Principal should document the decision and record the student as absent.

Approving authority	Director, Education Excellence
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