



# Absentee Policy

## 1. OVERVIEW

This policy is in line with the SA Education Department's *Attendance Policy* for all government schools. The policy describes the compulsory nature of education and underlines the responsibilities of all members of the St Dominic's Priory College community to ensure that students enrolled at the college are attending school. It also reflects research that indicates attendance at school positively affects learning, wellbeing, employment and life outcomes for children and young people.

## 2. SCOPE

The purpose of this attendance policy is to:

- + Reflect the intent of the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* and the associated *Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020 (the Regulations)*
- + Guide the actions of all staff working with children and young people and their parents/guardians on matters relating to school attendance and participation
- + Inform the development of associated guidelines and procedures for promoting, monitoring and reporting on attendance
- + Promote and support attendance at St Dominic's Priory College
- + Reinforce parent/guardian's obligations to ensure all children are enrolled and attend school on every day that instruction is provided for the child at the school or approved learning program.

The policy applies to St Dominics Priory College:

- + All girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College
- + Parents/guardians of girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College
- + All staff
- + Volunteers and providers of services for children and young people where:
  - any provision of service has an impact on an enrolled student's attendance
  - a provider has an obligation to adopt the policy in accordance with the terms of their service agreement or contract with the College
- + All procedures, guidelines and strategies developed to support the attendance of girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College.

## 3. OUT OF SCOPE

The policy does not apply where:

- + A student at St Dominic's Priory College is exempt from attendance at school under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* (for example under an approved exemption for a home education program)
- + A student at St Dominic's Priory College is subject to a legal condition imposed by the South Australia Police (SAPOL), a court or an officer exercising a statutory authority that requires they be exempt from attendance.



## 4. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

### 4.1 POLICY REQUIREMENTS

The policy requirements provide an overview of St Dominic's Priory College's commitment to actions which ensure attendance by our enrolled girls at school and encourage participation in education.

Shared understandings, collaborative development and promotion of attendance improvement practices are essential to support all members of the school community to positively influence the girls' wellbeing, learning and life through attendance at school.

Attendance strategies must be purposeful and directed by the six (6) core functions of attendance improvement.

- + 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
- + Assess patterns of non-attendance and circumstances to inform the development of appropriate targeted, intensive and coordinated interventions
- + Actively engage and include all girls and their families in education and interventions which support attendance
- + Provide support to address the barriers to attendance, learning and wellbeing and ensuring inclusive support for girls so they can be physically present and engaged in education
- + Monitor attendance to ensure that risks are identified, supports are in place, and progress is reviewed
- + Evaluate the need for further or ongoing interventions, referrals for external support and mandatory notifications.

These policy requirements must be documented in local attendance improvement plans and implemented at a:

- + Universal level, incorporating whole school and classroom strategies
- + Targeted level for individuals or groups of children and young people
- + Intensive level for those children and young people requiring specialist support.

Review and refinement of practices which support these requirements must be undertaken as part of the policy planning cycle.

### 4.2 COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

The *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* and the Regulations impose statutory responsibilities in relation to attendance at school.

The *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* requires that children must be enrolled in a school or approved learning program from the age of six 6 years to 17 years.



The *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* also requires that a child must either:

- + Attend the school at which they are enrolled on every day the school is open and at all school activities the school requires the child to attend, or
- + Participate in the approved learning program in which they are enrolled.

Parents/Guardians have a responsibility under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* to ensure their children attend school regularly. If a child or young person does not attend, without a 'prescribed reason' for their non-attendance or an approved exemption, their parents/guardian may be guilty of an offence.

The Regulations stipulate that a leader's responsibilities include:

- + The management of the day-to-day operations of the school
- + The welfare and development of the students.

The Regulations stipulate that school staff responsibilities include:

- + Being actively concerned with the welfare and development of the students in the teacher's care
- + Participating in processes for determining school policies and properly implementing those policies
- + Assisting in the general management of the school as required by the Principal and/or Delegate.

The College's position is that the management of attendance is a central element of day-to-day operations and is essential to student learning and wellbeing. Therefore, all staff have a fundamental obligation to follow policy and procedures that ensure attendance by students enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College. They encourage full participation in educational opportunities.

St Dominic's Priory College staff have a duty of care which requires them to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm to students. This policy and its associated procedures outline the specific functions to be undertaken to fulfil this duty of care in respect of student attendance.

Authorised officers at the College, namely Pastoral Care staff and Year Level Coordinators under the Regulations are required to exhaust all practicable efforts to ensure attendance at school and approved learning programs by girls enrolled at the College. They have specific powers to support this work. People who refuse to answer an authorised officer's questions or obstruct them in this work may be reported under the act.

#### 4.3 COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE

A child who is at least 6 years old but not yet 17 years of age is known as being of compulsory school age. Every child of compulsory school age is required to be enrolled at a government or non-government school and is required to fully participate in the education program arranged and approved by the enrolling school.



#### 4.4 COMPULSORY EDUCATION AGE

All young people are required to participate in an approved learning program from the age of six 6 years to 17 years, or until they have achieved an appropriate qualification under an approved learning program, whichever happens first. This is called Compulsory Education Age. Approved learning programs include:

- + Traditional schooling, including
  - SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education)
  - International Baccalaureate (IB)
  - Steiner Education (Waldorf Schools) Secondary Certificate.
- + Vocational Education Training (VET), Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses or accredited courses offered by registered training organisations (RTOs)
- + Apprenticeships or traineeships
- + University degrees, diplomas or other university award courses
- + Other programs authorised by the Minister (or delegate)
- + Or a combination of the above.

#### 4.5 STARTING SCHOOL (SINGLE INTAKE)

The Minister for Education, under Regulation 63 of the Regulations, is able to determine whether, and at what times, children who are under 6 years of age may apply to be enrolled and admitted to that school.

While there is no legal requirement for children under the age of 6 years to be engaged in schooling or an approved learning program, there is an expectation that, once enrolled, girls at St Dominic's Priory College will attend on a regular basis to participate and complete their education program.

All children are legally required to be enrolled in a school by their 6<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### 5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 5.1 THE DEPARTMENT

- + Lead and manage South Australia's public education system in government school, preschool and other education and care settings
- + Provide advice and support to leaders and educators to ensure the establishment, maintenance and promotion of active preschool and school attendance improvement processes are in place (including collaboration with other agencies).

#### 5.2 EDUCATION DIRECTORS

- + Ensure attendance improvement is implemented consistently
- + Monitor the development and implementation of school attendance improvement plans via site review processes



- + Oversee reports and analysis of attendance data
- + Monitor and report on partnership improvements in attendance
- + Provide advice to the department about potential state-wide strategies based on local information
- + Inform authorities of children and young people identified to be at high risk in regards to attendance and actions undertaken to support them as appropriate.

### 5.3 EXTERNAL ALLIED HEALTH - STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Responsible for ensuring the delivery of specialist advice and services to support targeted, intensive and coordinated interventions for children in education, early childhood and care services who require high quality multi-disciplinary support.

They consist of social workers (truancy), psychologists, special educators, speech pathologists, behaviour support coaches, Aboriginal services engagement officers and their managers.

### 5.4 SCHOOL LEADERS

Optimise the attendance of all girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College by making sure:

- + All school staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the attendance of all girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College
- + They work with staff and the school community to develop the best outcomes for the girls in relation to school attendance
- + Information about the attendance expectations is communicated and easily accessible by staff, students, families and members of the public
- + Data is analysed to inform strategies and the review of procedures that support attendance improvement
- + Reports on attendance are provided through the College's semester reporting
- + Parent/guardian notification and, in some cases, home visits, are in place to follow up non-attendance responses and ensure interventions are documented
- + Attendance records are maintained in the College's Learning Management System
- + Student attendance is monitored to identify habitual and chronic non-attenders so the provision of early, timely and appropriate supports can be put in place
- + They refer to, consult with and work collaboratively with department staff and other relevant agencies to address attendance and related concerns, review whole-school systems, strategies and processes to ensure a continuous improvement cycle for individuals, families, schools and partnerships
- + They remain engaged with the student and their family before, during and after any interventions undertaken with Student Support Services



- + Mandatory notifications to Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) are made by staff as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, for concerns regarding:
  - A parent's/guardian's refusal to send their daughter to school or engage with any other education options available (including Open Access College or home schooling)
  - Refusal of offers of support or attempts to help the family to overcome barriers to attendance
  - A family having disengaged
  - The child's education being seriously interrupted by patterns of non-attendance that are enduring or ongoing in nature (noting that an enduring pattern does not require extended consecutive absence) as defined by the Department for Child Protection (DCP) in the Mandatory Reporting Guide.

### 5.5 SCHOOL STAFF

- + Support departmental requirements and locally developed and agreed upon attendance processes for the St Dominic's Priory College, while maintaining confidentiality
- + Provide a relevant and dynamic learning program and environment that seeks to engage all our girls and offers opportunity for success, thus encouraging regular attendance
- + Confidential record non-attendance according to departmental requirements
- + Contribute to the analysis of attendance trends and the development of attendance improvement plans
- + Implement attendance improvement plans on a case by case basis
- + Implement procedures, including parent communication, to follow up non-attendance
- + Work with parents/guardians and government and non-government agencies to support children and young people's regular attendance in the education program
- + Refer to confidential Student Support Services if support is required
- + Make mandatory notifications as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* and document and store as per College procedures.

### 5.6 PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND FAMILIES

Parents/Guardians must enrol their child in an education program as per department policy or, at minimum, from 6 years (the age of compulsion) in line with the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019*. Parents/Guardians must:

- + Enrol their daughter in a school or approved learning program
- + Provide information to the school that may help planning for their daughter's learning, for example medical conditions, developmental milestones and family issues
- + Ensure their daughter attends punctually on every day the education program is offered and to comply with the education program being offered



- + Provide an explanation to the school whenever their daughter is absent
- + Where appropriate, apply for an exemption when they wish to take their daughter out of school, such as for a family holiday. The procedure to be followed when applying for exemption from school, for three days or more, during Term time for all students 17 years and under includes a letter or email addressed to the Principal explaining the reasons for seeking exemption. Advance notice of at least 3 weeks is required.
- + Work with the school on intervention strategies to improve attendance.

Parents/Guardians can discuss with the Principal and/or Delegate any concerns that may require a mandatory notification as per the reporting suspected harm of a child guidance, and RRHAN-EC Mandatory Notification Training.

### 5.7 GIRLS ENROLLED AT ST DOMINIC'S PRIORY COLLEGE

Girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College have responsibility for their attendance

- + The level of responsibility will be determined by the individual circumstances of each girl.

It is expected that girls enrolled at St Dominic's Priory College will:

- + Attend school or an approved learning program on every day the program is offered
- + Be punctual in arriving at school or the approved learning program and for all associated lessons and activities
- + Participate appropriately in school and approved learning program activities.

Only an enrolling parent/guardian is authorised to contact the College to inform of a student's non-attendance. In the case where a student has less than 95% attendance, the College is authorised to request official supporting documentation to verify absence is genuine.

## 6. DEFINITIONS

### 6.1 ADULT

Person who has attained 18 years of age.

### 6.2 APPROVED LEARNING PROGRAMS

- + SACE (South Australian Certificate of Education)
- + Vocational Education and Training courses administered through Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses or accredited RTOs
- Apprenticeships or traineeships
- Other programs authorised by the minister (or delegate)
- a combination of the above.



### 6.3 AUTHORISED OFFICER

The *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* sets out people who are authorised officers. This includes any member from SAPOL. In exercising its power under this section, the following people have been authorised by the department to also be an Authorised Officer:

- + Senior social workers and social workers
- + Aboriginal services engagement officers.

Authorised officers can ask a child or young person (or the adult they are with) in a public place for their:

- + Name, age and address
- + Reason for not being at school.

Authorised officers may at any time attend at residential premises and request any person in the premises to provide the officer with:

- + The full names of all children and young people resident in the dwelling house
- + The respective ages of those children
- + The schools or the approved learning program in which, (if any) they are enrolled.

SAPOL officers also have the additional discretion to either:

- + Return the child to the school
- + Return the child to the guardian.

A person is guilty of an offence if they:

- + Hinder or obstruct an authorised officer, or a person assisting an authorised officer
- + Use abusive, threatening or insulting language to an authorised officer, or a person assisting an authorised officer
- + When required by an authorised officer to answer a question, refuse or fail to answer the question to the best of the person's knowledge, information and belief
- + Falsely represent, by words or conduct, that they are an authorised officer.

### 6.4 HABITUAL NON-ATTENDER

A student who is absent for 5 days or more per term (average of 1 day per fortnight) for any reason chronic non-attender. A student who is absent for 10 days or more per term (average of 1 day per week) for any reason.

### 6.5 COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE

A child of or above the age of 6 years but under the age of 17 years (ie from 6 years 0 months to 17 years 0 months inclusive).

### 6.6 COMPULSORY EDUCATION AGE

A young person who is 6 years of age to 17 years of age.



### 6.7 HOME EDUCATION

A child exempted from attending school whose education will be conducted by one or both of a child's parents from a home base. A child must be registered for home education with the department.

### 6.8 HOME VISITS

Home visits describe any meeting with clients and families outside of the school/educational setting. By definition, they most regularly occur in the home but they may also be held in other public places such as a local cafe or library.

### 6.9 IN LOCO PARENTIS

A person acting in a parental style relationship with a child. For example, the person has intended to place themselves in the position of a parent toward a child where they have assumed the same duty and authority as a parent with respect to nurturing, control and protection of a child. A person(s) in loco parentis may include an individual/s:

- + in a de facto relationship with a child's biological parent where they have responsibility for the child or young person
- + With legal custody of a child
- + Who has taken over care of a child after the death of both biological parents, or where there has been a family breakdown and the child is estranged from both biological parents
- + An informal fostering arrangement.

This person does not have to assume any or all financial responsibility for a child to satisfy this definition. Also refer to the definition of parent/guardian below.

### 6.10 LEGAL GUARDIAN

A legal guardian is a person who has the legal authority (and the corresponding duty) to care for the personal and property interests of another person.

### 6.11 PARENT / GUARDIAN

A parent/guardian of a child includes:

- + A biological parent who has parental responsibility of the child or young person
- + A person who has been granted legal guardianship or custody of a child or young person by a court
- + A step-parent of a child or young person who is responsible for the child or young person
- + A person standing in loco parentis to the child or young person.

This does not include a parent of the child or young person who has had their legal responsibility or guardianship removed by a court, Act or law.

### 6.12 PRESCRIBED REASON FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Under the *Education and Children's Services Act 2019* the following are prescribed reasons for non-attendance at school and approved learning programs by children and young people:



- + The child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by her sickness, or by her temporary or permanent infirmity
- + There was a danger of the child being affected by an infectious or contagious disease
- + The child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by some other unavoidable and sufficient cause.

Additionally the following is also a prescribed reason for non-attendance in an approved learning program:

- + The child was prevented from participating in the approved learning program on the occasion in question by reason of having to care for a member of their family.

#### 6.13 PROVIDERS OF SERVICES

Non-government personnel who provide services to children and young people under compulsion to attend school. This may include personnel contracted to the department, for example pastoral care workers through the National Schools Chaplaincy program, case managers through flexible learning options (FLO) and providers through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

#### 6.14 SCHOOLS, PRESCHOOLS AND OTHER EDUCATION AND CARE SETTINGS

Government education, early childhood and care services at which education services (courses of instruction in preschool, primary or secondary education) are provided, or students enrolled, and who are registered with the education standards board per the *Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011*.

#### 6.15 STAFF

Applies to all persons who are employed by St Dominic's Priory College.

### 7. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Supporting information can be found on the College website at:

**[www.stdominics.sa.edu.au](http://www.stdominics.sa.edu.au)**

### 8. RELATED LEGISLATION

*Education and Children's Services Act 2019*

*Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020*

*Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011*

*Education and Early Childhood Services National Regulations (2011)*

*Equal Opportunity Act 1984*

*Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

*Disability Inclusion Act 2018*

*Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*