

## Policy

# Attendance Policy

Please note this policy is mandatory and staff are required to adhere to the content

*This document is currently under review. Please direct any queries regarding this document to the policy officer listed in Table 1.*

### Insert file number

### Summary

The Education Act requires all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 to participate in a full-time approved learning program. This policy discusses the importance of regular attendance and the consequences for irregular or non-attendance and strategies to combat this.

Table 1 - Document details

<b>Publication date</b>	1 April 2012
<b>Review date</b>	1 December 2015
<b>Related legislation/applicable section of legislation</b>	Education Act 1972 Education Regulations 2012 Compulsory Education Legislation Children's Protection Act 1993
<b>Related policies, procedures, guidelines, standards, frameworks</b>	Attendance Requirements
<b>Replaces</b>	
<b>Policy officer (position)</b>	Policy Advisor: Attendance
<b>Policy officer (phone)</b>	8226 1062
<b>Policy sponsor (position)</b>	Director, Community Planning and Service Development
<b>Executive director responsible (position and office)</b>	Executive Director, Office for Children and Young People
<b>Applies to</b>	Schools
<b>Key words</b>	Attendance, non-attendance, irregular attendance, truancy, late
<b>Status</b>	Approved
<b>Approved by</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Approval date</b>	1 April 2009
<b>Version</b>	2

Table 2 - Revision record

Date	Version	Revision description
January 2003	1	Original Draft Approved by CE
1 April 2009	2	Update to Approved Document by CE

## 2. ATTENDANCE POLICY



## **FOREWORD**

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) is committed to giving children the best start. To this end, the DECS Attendance Policy clearly states an expectation that all children and young people will attend preschool and school in line with the requirements of the education program organised for them. This Attendance Policy places priority on the early identification of non-attendance and irregular attendance, and together with the Attendance Package, provides directions that will be used by communities, preschools and schools in working together to support children and students in their learning. These partnerships are important to shaping the futures of children and young people. While the Policy makes explicit expected outcomes, broad strategies and responsibilities, it provides for local decision making about the specific strategies that will best meet the needs of each community. This Policy will strengthen the local practices that already support regular attendance.



Chris Robinson

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

April 2009

## **INTRODUCTION**

Government preschools and schools in South Australia are committed to educational excellence. Parents/caregivers and preschools and schools work in partnership to provide children and students with learning opportunities that will provide a solid foundation for the future.

Children and students need to maximise attendance at preschool and school to gain optimum benefit from education. Ensuring regular attendance at preschool and school is a shared responsibility between parents/caregivers, preschools and schools.

Research shows that success in learning is directly proportional to regular attendance and participation in education programs.

Non-attendance and irregular attendance can be viewed as early indicators of the potential for disengagement from the education program. There is a correlation between under-achievement in primary school and non-attendance in later years and consequently lack of success in adult life. Absence from school can limit a student's achievement of essential knowledge and skills required for effective participation in work, relationships and families, and active citizenship. DECS, together with other government agencies and the community share a responsibility to support young people's regular to attendance at school.

The Education Act 1972 (the Act) provides for compulsory attendance of any child required to be enrolled at the school for which she or he has been enrolled on every day, and for such parts of every day, as instruction is provided at the school for the child (subsection 76(1)) between the ages of 6 and 16 years.

The Compulsory Education Legislation, implemented at the beginning of 2009, requires all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 to participate in a full-time approved learning program.

Although there is no legal requirement for pre and post compulsory aged learners to enrol in a preschool or school, there is an expectation that once enrolled, learners will attend on a regular basis to successfully participate and complete their education program.

## **RATIONALE**

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) is accountable to the community, through the Minister for Education and Children's Services, for ensuring appropriate attendance in government educational programs.

This policy is based on the following principles:

- Society has a responsibility to prepare young people for successful participation in learning and the broader community.
- Families, society, peers and educators and other significant adults influence the life choices of young people.
- Attendance has benefits and consequences that increase or decrease life choices.
- Individuals are able to accept responsibility for their participation in educational programs according to their level of development.
- Continuity of relationships and learning in an educational program is dependent upon attendance.
- Attendance is a shared responsibility between the staff of preschools and schools, parents/caregivers, children and students, and members of the wider community.
- Attendance is critically linked to the quality of the curriculum, teaching and learning and the development of relationships, which then foster improved learning outcomes and increased wellbeing for individuals and groups.
- Participation in educational programs fosters the development of personal and social skills.

Early identification of, and intervention in, poor attendance is known to improve child and student learning outcomes. Children and students who have patterns of poor attendance are at risk, as they may not achieve their potential in educational and social development.

This means that these children and students may:

- be socially isolated
- place themselves at risk of personal harm during times of absence
- have reduced life choices
- be more likely to be involved in socially unacceptable and/or illegal activities.

Research has shown that once students have begun to absent themselves from school, and the initial cause of this remains undetected or unexplored, it is likely that the pattern of absence will continue and escalate through the student's subsequent school career. Late arrival at school through the primary years is often related to non-attendance during secondary school.

A range of overseas and Australian research studies have demonstrated a clear relationship between school-based factors and patterns of non-attendance. These studies point to the following significant influences on student attendance patterns:

- school organisation and climate
- bullying and harassment
- curriculum
- teaching practices
- student-teacher relationships.

Issues of gender, socio-economic status, cultural and social diversity, family and personal circumstance and disability can be significant contributors to absenteeism.

The staffs of pre-schools and schools need to consider these when analysing attendance data to ensure that strategies to address poor attendance are appropriate and effective.

Positive attendance patterns should be fostered with all children and students by all educators within the Department. All educators need to consider varying strategies that enable children and students to maintain their engagement with education when circumstances do legitimately dictate some irregularities in attendance.

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS), through its offices, pre schools and schools and in partnership with their communities, will provide an educational program that promotes attendance and engagement for all children and students enrolled in government preschools and schools.

Educators at preschools and schools will actively intervene when attendance and engagement patterns indicate that learners are at risk of not realising their educational and social development potential.

### **Policy outcomes**

Implementation of this policy will result in the following outcomes:

- Improvement in children's and students' attendance and participation as shown in the data collected by each preschool and school
- Improvement in learning outcomes as measured by preschool, school and system assessment processes
- Increased understanding of the importance of regular attendance by the community of educators, learners and families of each preschool and school
- Each preschool and school reporting to its community and DECS on attendance through the annual reporting cycle
- Ongoing analysis of attendance data is conducted which informs the review of each preschool's and school's policies and procedures
- Procedures based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data to improve attendance are consistently implemented and monitored by DECS through its offices, preschools and schools

### **Strategies**

Strategies to support the achievement of these outcomes include:

- Preschool and schools, in consultation with their communities, developing and implementing an Attendance Improvement Plan, which includes attendance targets.
- Preschool and schools monitoring and analysing attendance data to enable sites to implement strategies to ensure that improvement targets identified in the Attendance Improvement Plan are met
- Monitoring and analysis of state wide data to inform DECS strategic directions regarding policy and program development
- Coordination of interagency support by preschool, school or district support staff, as appropriate, when intervention is required
- Engagement of children and students in their learning through quality curriculum, teaching and learning, and relationships, and appropriate preschool and school structures and processes.

## **Responsibilities**

The responsibilities for attendance and consequences for non-attendance are clearly described in the Administrative instructions and guidelines (AIGs)—refer to section 3, from page 11. These detail:

- Attendance expectation
- Data collection
- Monitoring expectation
- Exemption
- Unsatisfactory attendance
- Prosecution.

Regional Directors, principals and preschool directors are responsible to the Chief Executive DECS for implementing the Attendance Policy.

There are other government agencies that also have some responsibility to contribute to the attendance of children and young people. South Australia Police (SAPOL) and DECS have a Memorandum of Understanding and a Truancy Schedule that describes the role of police officers in returning school age children and students to school.

Families SA and DECS also have a protocol to support the issue of chronic non-attendance: *Interagency Processes for Chronic Non-Attenders*

A range of support services for children, students, families and sites is provided by other interagency staff.

## **Responsibilities of executive directors/ directors**

Executive directors and directors are responsible for ensuring that DECS policies and processes support maximum attendance and will:

- Provide advice to the Chief Executive regarding state-wide attendance trends and emerging issues
- Develop system-wide attendance strategies in consultation with districts and sites
- Ensure communication processes enable attendance information to contribute to strategic planning.
- Approve applications for exemption from attendance at school for periods of one month or more

## **Responsibilities of Regional Directors/Assistant Regional Directors**

Regional Directors are responsible for ensuring that attendance is maximised for all children and students in their region.

Regional Directors will:

- Monitor the development and implementation of school Attendance Improvement Plans and Quality Assurance processes
- Monitor and report on regional improvements in attendance

- Provide advice to the Department about potential state-wide strategies based on local information
- Monitor and analyse attendance data for reporting to Executive Directors/Directors
- Disseminate up-to-date advice on attendance issues to Regional Support Services personnel, preschools and schools
- Monitor Interagency processes in relation to Attendance
- Inform Executive Directors/Directors of students identified to be at high risk in regards to attendance

### **Responsibilities of Managers of Regional Support Services**

Managers of Regional Support Services are responsible for ensuring the delivery of high quality multi-disciplinary support services to manage issues that relate to poor school attendance.

Managers of Regional Support Services are located in regional offices and will:

- Manage the Support Services team, which includes Student Attendance Counsellors, to improve student attendance,
- Maintain up to date and accurate data collection, including the use of Support Services Data System (SSDS) and a single file for all referred students
- Provide up-to-date advice on attendance issues to preschools and schools
- Assist Student Attendance Counsellors to prioritise of casework
- Monitor the management of complex cases and facilitate intra and interagency responses as required
- Ensure the “DECS Interagency Chronic Non-Attendees Protocol” is actioned as required
- Maintain a register of all Mandatory Notifications and store as per DECS procedures
- Ensure “DECS Prosecution procedures are actioned as required
- Provide up to date reporting to Regional Directors of students identified to be at high risk in relation to attendance

### **Responsibilities of Student Attendance Counsellors**

Student Attendance Counsellors assist schools, families and students to manage issues that relate to poor student attendance.

Student Attendance Counsellors are located in regional offices and will:

- Provide a consulting and counselling service to schools
- Support schools in monitoring and improving attendance through a documented plan for the student
- Work with identified students and their parents/caregivers to support improved attendance
- Identify reasons for non-attendance and develop and document all strategies to improve attendance

- Develop and implement special projects to meet the needs of students at risk through non-attendance
- Inform parents/caregivers of their legal responsibilities in relation to attendance and possible implications of non-compliance (see AIGs and the Attendance improvement package)
- Review, with Line Manager, all cases unresolved after 10 weeks
- Prepare case files and documentation for prosecutions
- Implement the “DECS Interagency Chronic Non-Attendees Protocol” as required

### **Responsibilities of Principals and Preschool directors**

Principals and preschool directors are responsible for ensuring that the attendance of all children and students is maximised and will:

- Develop and implement the site’s Attendance Improvement Plan
- Ensure the maintenance of attendance records
- Ensure intervention is documented
- Monitor and analyse attendance data and report to the school community through the site’s annual report
- Ensure procedures, including parent/caregiver notification and home visits, are in place to follow up non-attendance
- Ensure intervention in preschools and schools occurs after 10 days of accumulated absence or sooner if the child or student has a poor attendance record
- Make referral to, and seek support from, agencies and support services when a learner’s pattern of attendance becomes irregular
- Ensure that the analysis of data is used effectively to inform action at the site with the involvement of the preschool’s or school’s community
- Remain engaged with the family throughout the referral and case management process undertaken by DECS Support Services
- Ensure that notifications about suspicions of neglect and/abuse are made in addition to a referral to Regional Support Services.

### **Responsibilities of preschool and school staff**

Staff in preschool and school sites are responsible for supporting the agreed attendance improvement processes for the site and will:

- Provide a relevant and dynamic learning program that seeks to engage all children and students and offers opportunity for success, thus encouraging regular attendance
- Record attendances/absences according to DECS requirements
- Contribute to the analysis of attendance trends and the development and implementation of preschool and school Attendance Improvement Plans
- Implement preschool and school procedures, including parent/caregiver notification, to follow up non-attendance
- Work with parents/caregivers and government agencies to support learners’ regular attendance in the education program

- Refer all students, under compulsion, with unsatisfactory attendance to student attendance counsellors (form ED171—Report of Unsatisfactory Attendance or Single Referral form) if the actions above have proved unsuccessful
- Liaise with the student, the family, any involved agencies and the student attendance counsellor once a referral is made.
- Make Mandatory Notifications as appropriate, document and store as per DECS procedures

**NOTE:** While it is acknowledged that children are not under compulsion to attend preschool or school until their sixth birthday, staff in these sites should work with parents/caregivers to establish a regular attendance pattern as early as possible.

### **Responsibilities of parents/caregivers**

Parents/caregivers must enrol their child in an education program from 6 years (the age of compulsion).

When they enrol their child in a preschool or school they accept the responsibility to:

- Provide information to the preschool or school that may assist planning for the child's learning; for example, medical conditions, developmental milestones and family issues
- Enable their child to attend punctually and regularly on every day the education program is offered and to comply with the education program being offered
- Provide an explanation to the preschool or school whenever their child is absent. Apply for an exemption whenever their child is removed from the school
- Work with the preschool or school on intervention strategies to improve attendance
- Discuss with the principal/director any suspicions of neglect and/or abuse that may require a mandatory notification.

### **Responsibilities of children and students**

Children and students enrolled in a preschool or school site have responsibility for their attendance. The level of responsibility will be determined by the individual circumstances of the child.

The expectations are that they:

- Attend preschool, school or other educational program as negotiated regularly on every day the program is offered
- Be punctual in arriving at preschool, school or the educational program and for all associated lessons and activities
- Engage appropriately in the education program as negotiated

## **APPENDIX**

## **Education Act 1972**

Under the Education Act 1972, children enter compulsory schooling at the age of 6 years. The Act was amended in August 2002 to increase the school leaving age from 15 to 16 years, from 1 January 2003. As such the Act now provides for compulsory attendance of any child required to be enrolled at the school for which she or he has been enrolled on every day, and for such parts of every day, as instruction is provided at the school for the child (subsection 76(1)).

The Compulsory Education Age legislation, which was implemented from the beginning of 2009, requires all young people between the ages of 16 and 17 to participate full-time in an approved learning program, which is education or training delivered through a school, university or registered training organisation, an apprenticeship or traineeship, or a combination of these. The Compulsory Education Age legislation does not change the school leaving age, which remains at 16.

The Education Act 1972 provides for this subsection to not apply in respect of a child who has been enrolled in accordance with the Education Regulations at a correspondence school or in respect of a child exempted from attendance in accordance with the provisions of the Act.

Where a child fails to attend school as required by the Act, each parent/caregiver of the child shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a monetary penalty. Where a child's education program provides for off-site instruction, it is a requirement that the child attend in line with the requirements of the education program. Prosecution for non-attendance by a child of compulsory age will be initiated only after all other intervention has been attempted and prosecution is considered to be in the best interests of the child.

The Act further provides for the Minister or a delegate to exempt any child conditionally, or unconditionally, from attendance. Such exemptions may provide for online learning, home schooling and other like programs.

Refer also to the Administrative Instructions and Guidelines:

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/policy/pages/OSPP/AIG/>