**HAYES PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL- DEPARTMENT PROCEDURES**

**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

## Rationale

All schools in New South Wales are committed to providing safe and supportive learning environments for all students which address their educational needs. In NSW all children between the ages of six and below the minimum school leaving age of seventeen are legally required to attend school or an educational facility. Regular attendance at school is essential if students are to maximise their potential. Schools, in partnership with parents, are responsible for promoting the regular attendance of students. Parents are legally responsible for the regular attendance of their children and school staff are responsible for the monitoring of part or whole day absences.

Hayes Park Public School expects all children to be at school each day. We expect students to be on time for the bell at 8:55am.

Hayes Park Public School attendance policy aims to inform parents on our expectations and provide an understanding of the importance of daily school attendance. It also aims to provide an outline of the procedures in place to monitor attendance.

## School community beliefs about the importance of attending school

It is important that students, staff and parents/carers have a shared understanding of the importance of attending school. Hayes Park Public School:

* believes all children should be enrolled at school and attend school all day, every school day
* monitors, communicates and implements strategies to improve regular school attendance
* believes truanting can place a student in unsafe situations and impact on their future employability and life choices
* believes attendance at school is the responsibility of everyone in the community.

## Responsibilities

**Parent responsibilities:**

Parents must ensure:

* their children of compulsory school age are enrolled in a government or registered non-government school or, registered with the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) for Home Schooling.
* their children who are enrolled at school attend every day the school is open for instruction.
* they provide an explanation for absences to the school within 7 days from the first day of any period of absence through means such as telephone call, written note, text message or email. The 7 day timeframe for explaining absences is a requirement of the *Education Act (1990).*
* they work in partnership with the school to plan and implement strategies to support regular attendance at school. This includes communicating with the school if they are aware of issues impacting on their child’s attendance or engagement with school.

**Staff responsibilities:**

* provide a caring teaching and learning environment which fosters students’ sense of wellbeing and belonging to the school community.
* promote regular attendance at school through teaching and learning activities that acknowledge the learning and support needs of students.
* maintain accurate records of student attendance.
* alert the principal, or staff member responsible for monitoring attendance, when a student’s pattern of attendance is of concern, or if no explanation is received from the parent or carer within required timeframes.
* when nominated by the principal, liaise with external agencies, arrange referrals, coordinate involvement of the school with other services and agencies working with students, and provide feedback about outcomes to the principal.
* who have concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person must report their concerns to the principal.

**Principal responsibilities:**

The School Attendance Policy outlines core responsibilities of principals regarding school attendance. To effectively implement the school attendance policy principals must ensure:

* all attendance records including details of transfers and exemptions are accessible to the Director Public Schools NSW, attendance officers and other personnel nominated by the Secretary Department of Education and Communities, Director Public Schools NSW, or Audit Directorate.
* the school regularly evaluates and addresses school attendance through the school plan.
* open communication on issues affecting student attendance is promoted with parents.
* effective strategies are in place to contact parents where there is a pattern of attendance causing concern or the parent has failed to provide a satisfactory explanation for an absence.
* interpreters and translated materials, including letters are available when communicating with parents from language backgrounds other than English in matters relating to school attendance.
* school staff are trained to implement school attendance policies and procedures and that personnel with delegated responsibility for maintaining attendance records are supervised.
* all cases of unsatisfactory attendance, including part day absences are investigated promptly and school based factors impacting on attendance are addressed.
* early identification of students at risk of developing poor school attendance patterns through strategies such as regular roll checks.
* attendance reports from roll checks are generated at least fortnightly and tabled at Learning Support Team or attendance meetings for follow up by appropriate staff members.
* the school’s Learning and Support Team in partnership with parents identify and implement strategies that address the learning and support needs of a student with attendance patterns of concern.
* parents, students and the school community are regularly informed of the importance of school and attendance requirements. A range of resources (refer to resource section) have been developed for schools to provide information to parents and key community groups about the requirements of school attendance.
* effective referral and support networks are established so that students, whose attendance is identified as being of concern, and their families can be connected with relevant services within the department and with local external agencies. Appropriate staff members may be nominated to meet with parents, arrange referrals and to be the contact points for consultation and coordination of school involvement.
* communication, collaboration and information sharing occurs with other services and agencies to enhance the effectiveness of interventions with students and families.
* any other child protection concerns underlying school attendance issues (including educational neglect) are managed consistent with the Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People Policy and Procedures.
* if concerns include not sighting the child principals must, as soon as possible contact the NSW Police Force to request that a child safety check be undertaken.
* consideration is given to the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG), specialist advice and professional judgement, where there are concerns about suspected risk of harm. In accordance with the MRG Neglect Education - Habitual Absence is defined as ‘The child/young person is of compulsory school age (6 years to current leaving age) AND is habitually absent’. ‘Habitually absent is a minimum of 30 days absence within the past 100 school days. However, principals should consider other factors, such as the student’s age and learning support needs in deciding on action earlier than the 30 days indicated.
* other decisions trees can be used if the underlying issues impacting on school attendance are also of concern. For example, care concerns, neglect: supervision, or child /young person is a danger to self and others.

## Responses to absences

When a **student is absent without explanation for 3 days** or a pattern of absences has been identified, Hayes Park Public School will take the following actions:

* Class Teacher will make contact with the parent to receive an explanation (via phone, email Class Dojo etc)
* Class teacher will attempt to leave a message if the call is unanswered and will expect a response.
* If the class teacher does not receive a response after a message is left the matter will be escalated to an executive

At Hayes Park Public School we are committed to achieving the Department’s targets in improving attendance and are proactive in doing so by:

* Sending home absence notes weekly to receive an explanation if one has not been received.
* Providing Attendance Notepads for parent ease and convenience. These are available from the front office.
* Allowing parents to give verbal notification via the front office and through email/class dojo.

**Principals can decline to accept an explanation for an absence and record the absence as ‘unjustified’.**

## Unsatisfactory Patterns of Absence: School Follow-up

At Hayes Park Public School the consequences or impacts of unexplained or unauthorised absences might include the following:

* Parents are responsible for the regular attendance of students at school. Principals and school staff, in consultation with students and their parents will usually be able to resolve problems of non-attendance. While parents should be reminded of their legal obligations under the Education Act (1990) the benefits of attending school regularly should be the focus of this consultation.
* A child is considered to have an unsatisfactory school attendance when they have:
* regular absences without explanation (despite follow-up from the school)
* regular absences and explanations provided by parents are not accepted by the principal, or
* extended periods of absence without an explanation or the explanation is not accepted by the principal. An extended period of absence may be consecutive or irregular patterns of non-attendance.
* The most effective means of restoring and maintaining regular school attendance includes attendance monitoring practices and regular follow-up of unexplained absences **by contacting parents on the same day or the following day of an absence**. Early telephone contact with parents is one means of achieving this.
* Resolution of attendance difficulties may require more targeted school based strategies including:
  + - meeting with the student and parents
    - referral to the school’s Learning and Support Team to identify and implement strategies that address the learning and support needs for the student
    - development of a school-based attendance improvement plan with the student and parents
    - engaging identified groups of students in programs that support regular attendance and punctuality
    - referral to the school counsellor
    - requesting and sharing information and working collaboratively with other government or non-government agencies
    - use of interpreters and translated materials
    - The school should identify if other agencies are involved with the family and liaise with them when a student’s attendance is of concern and where it is determined that the issues impacting on attendance are outside of the role of the school to address in isolation. The school may have a role in working collaboratively with the services to engage the family. Family case discussions should be attended by school representatives if the issues relate to students whose attendance is a concern. Meetings and interviews at the school may also involve representatives from support agencies. They may be initiated by school, other agency or departmental staff. Schools may also refer families to services, in discussion with families.
    - If a range of school based interventions has been unsuccessful in resolving attendance difficulties the principal should request support by making an application to the Home School Liaison Program and submitting the application to their local Educational Services Team for consideration.

## Frequent explained absences due to illness.

* Where frequent absences are explained as being due to illness consultation with parents must occur regarding the health care needs of the child.
* Principals can request that the parents provide a medical certificate if they have concerns with the explanation provided, or where there is a history of poor attendance.
* Where principals have concerns about the medical certificates being produced for absences they can ask the parents to request that the medical certificate states “the child is unfit for school” on specified dates.
* Where principals have ongoing concerns they can request the parent’s consent for a doctor to provide information to the school about their child’s health condition. It is essential the school has all relevant information so that the learning and health care needs of the student can be addressed. If the request is denied or if the principal is still not satisfied with the reason for absence, they can record the absence as ‘unjustified’. The principal must consider whether the habitual absence or parental attitude places the child or young person at suspected risk of harm.
* Principals can seek information from prescribed bodies under Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 where they have ongoing concerns regarding a student’s safety, welfare or wellbeing. They should also the Child Wellbeing Unit (CWU) or if they believe the student is at risk of significant harm the Child Protection Helpline.

## Application for Leave for Holidays/ Extended Leave

At Hayes Park Public School parents can fill out an application for extended leave.

* From the beginning of 2015, family holidays and travel are no longer considered under the *Exemption from School - Procedures*. **It is important to note that travel outside of vacation period is now counted as an absence** for statistical purposes.
* A Certificate of Extended Leave – Travel should not be issued where the principal is aware that the student has been the subject of a Child Protection report made to Family and Community Services, or contact with the Child Wellbeing Unit, and for whom unresolved issues concerning a risk of harm remain.
* A principal should not accept a reason for travel during school term if it is not in the best interests of the student. Educational, social and participation reasons, should be specified on the application.

* Travel is considered to be domestic or international travel for the purpose of a family holiday, family business, bereavement or other reasons, which should be specified on the application.
* Principals should consult with parents about the intention of the travel and in the case of family holidays encourage parents to take holidays with their child during school vacation periods.
* Where a principal considers that the travel is appropriate during school term, the principal should issue the parent with an Application for Extended Leave – Travel for completion and inform the parent that if the application is accepted, the absences will be recorded as “L” – Leave.
* Principals should request travel documentation, such as travel itinerary or e-ticket, and ensure this is attached to the application.
* Principals should ensure that parents are assisted with the completion of the application and provide a translation service if required.
* When travels period exceeds one school term access to Distance Education must be considered. Refer to *Distance Education: Enrolment Procedures 2014*
* Principals may decline to accept a parent’s Application for Extended Leave – Travel. In this case the parent must be advised in writing. Refer to example letter – Declining an Application for a Certificate of Extended Leave – Travel.
* If a student or students do not return on the date specified, the principal must ensure the parents are contacted to establish the whereabouts of the student. If contact is not established then the principal should follow processes associated with an Application for Home School Liaison Program support.
* On accepting a parent’s Application a Certificate of Extended Leave - Travel must be issued. The original certificate is provided to the parent and a copy of the certificate placed in each student’s record.
* An Application for Extended Leave form, Certificate of Extended Leave and example letter for declining an application are available in the appendices of this document. The application and certificate can be downloaded from the Department Website.

## Student Whereabouts Unknown

Some students may not be attending school because they may have moved or enrolled elsewhere, and their parents have not notified the school. In some cases the student may not have enrolled in another school. Prior to the student’s name being removed from the Attendance Register a number of actions need to be confirmed by the principal. This process is managed using the Enrolment Registration Number system, using the Registration Status ‘Left – Destination Unknown’.

* Where the student is of compulsory school age and has been marked as ‘absent’ for periods exceeding a total of 10 consecutive school days, where the school is open for instruction, and is believed to have left the school, the school should:

• contact the parent to seek an explanation

• contact the emergency contact recorded for the child

• investigate the student’s enrolment/registration status on Enrolment Registration Number records

• contact government and non-government schools within a reasonable radius of any presumed new residential address.

* Where the school is unable to determine the location of a student following its investigation, the school should submit an Application for Home School Liaison Program support. The Home School Liaison Officer (HSLO) will investigate the matter.
* any risk of significant harm issues including educational neglect will be reported to the Child Protection Helpline.
* where the family or student is missing (or their destination is unknown) and there may be concerns for their safety or wellbeing, a report is made within 24 hours to the Safety and Security Directorate to determine if the matter has been reported to the Police. Where no report is made the principal is to report the matter to their Local Police.

## Some related resources

