



# Student Attendance Policy and Procedure

# ATTENDANCE POLICY and PROCEDURES

## POLICY STATEMENT

### Legal Requirements

Under current NSW legislation, all children between the ages of 6 and the minimum leaving age of 17, are required to attend school on all designated school days. All students must complete Year 10, after which and until they turn 17, they must be:

- In school or registered for home schooling or
- In approved education or training such as TAFE, apprenticeship etc.
- In full time paid employment (av. 25 hour p/w) or
- In a combination of work, and education or training.

Students in Stage 6 must attend school in order to fulfil course requirements and accreditation for the Higher School Certificate.

### Parental Responsibilities

Section 22 of the *Education Act (1990)* states that it is the duty of the parent of a child to ensure that the child complies with the legal requirement to attend school. This may be:

- To be enrolled at, and to attend a government school or a registered non-government school, or
- To be registered for Home Schooling with the Board of Studies, and to receive instruction in accordance with the conditions to which the registration is subject
- To explain the absence of their child within 7 days
- To apply in advance for Extended Leave – Travel for travel of 5 days or greater
- To apply in advance for a Certificate of Exemption for any exceptional absence

### School Responsibilities

Schools have an important responsibility in maintaining a safe and supportive environment for students. Their role in monitoring and recording attendance involves:

- Providing clear and up to date information to both students and parents/caregivers regarding attendance, and the consequences of unsatisfactory attendance
- Maintaining clear and concise attendance records
- Encouraging and enforcing regular attendance
- Supporting parents by monitoring attendance and contacting parents in the case of unexplained absences
- Requesting assistance if required from Liaison Officers or Regional Attendance Officers and the Department of Education and Communities for support to resolve unacceptable attendance
- Providing procedures that follow procedural fairness guidelines in all circumstances.

### Principal's Responsibilities

The Principal of Covenant Christian School has the responsibility and authority to grant:

- Sick leave to students whose absence is genuinely due to illness
- Exemption from School Attendance for up to a total of 100 days in any 12 month period for any one student
- Exemption from School Attendance for part-day exemptions for periods totalling up to 100 days in a 12 month period
- Exemption from School Attendance for Extended Leave - Travel

## ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES

### *Purpose:*

- a) Maintain an accurate register of enrolment
- b) Ensure that school students enrolled at Covenant (both compulsory school-aged children and pre/post-compulsory school aged children) attend Covenant as they are able
- c) Record attendance and absence accurately, efficiently and effectively
- d) Comply with all legal requirements.

### *We believe:*

1. School is an extension of the home and staff members act “in loco parentis” during school hours
2. Monitoring of enrolment and attendance is part of the school’s duty of care and responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment
3. Monitoring of enrolment is also a legal requirement as the *Registered and Accredited Individual Non- Government Schools (NSW) Manual* - Section 3.8 states: “A registered non-government school must keep a register of enrolments and daily attendances of all children at the school...maintained in print or electronic form...copies of the information in the register...should be stored offsite at regular intervals... the register of daily attendances must be retained for a minimum period of seven (7) years after the last entry was made.”

### *Therefore we will:*

1. Encourage and expect all students to attend school where at all possible unless sickness, injury, essential appointment or a family matter prevails.
2. Maintain a register of enrolments that includes for each student:
  - a. Name, age and address
  - b. Name and contact telephone number of parent(s)/guardian(s)
  - c. Date of enrolment and, where appropriate, the date of leaving the school and the student’s destination school.
  - d. For students older than 6 years of age, previous school or pre-enrolment situation
  - e. Where the destination school of a student below 15 years of age is unknown, a record that a Department of Education and Training Officer with home school liaison responsibilities was notified of the student’s name, age and last known address.
3. Retain the register of enrolments for a minimum period of 5 years before archiving
4. Monitor the daily attendance/absence of students by:
  - a. maintaining electronic class rolls which contain:
    - i. noting of any absences in accordance with the directions outlined in the roll
    - ii. reason for absence in accordance with the directions outlined in the roll
    - iii. documentation from parent/guardian to substantiate reason for absence from school or class. This documentation will include:
      1. child’s name and class
      2. date of absence
      3. reason for absence
      4. signature of parent/carer (including electronically, see Appendix 1)
  - b. Marking the class rolls each day for K to 6, and in Period 1 and Period 3 for Years 7-10, every period for Years 11 & 12. This is done on Edumate Mark Roll. Should this not be available, a runner will take the absence list to the office.

- c. Students arriving late must sign in at the Front Office. The Office will mark the roll as "Arrived Late". Students will be given a slip to allow them to attend class
  - d. Marking class lists at special events such as sporting carnivals, excursions and off-site activities and transcribing information into rolls
  - e. Maintaining a partial absence note system administered by Office personnel
  - f. Maintaining the privacy of information in the rolls in accordance with the Covenant Privacy Policy
  - g. Retaining the class rolls and documentation for 7 years after the last entry was made
  - h. Returning absence notes directly to the School's Front Office where the reasons for absence are entered by Office Staff
  - i. Teaching staff review absence notes (both hard-copy and electronic) for veracity, and follow-up any suspected student-forgery (as per point 5 below).
  - j. Following up unexplained absences by sending home an "Absence Note Reminder" form if a written reason from the parent/ guardian is not received on the day of return from the absence and/or ring the parent/caregiver
  - k. Following up Partial Absence notes as needed
  - l. Providing parents and carers with pro forma absence notes and legally required documents for their use
  - m. Permitting Senior Students who have a late start may sign in late, and students who finish class before the end of the day to sign out early - Authorised late arrival/Early departure.
  - n. Emailing the daily Absences list from the Front Office to all teaching staff, who notify the office of any discrepancies. These are then followed up by the office.
5. Contact parents/guardians regarding poor school and/or class attendance. This will be done by the Home Class Teacher or Year Coordinator. Should a student have a pattern of unexplained absence or any unacceptable attendance pattern, the HCT will phone home to seek a reason. Front Office staff also draw the attention of the Deputy Principal Pastoral Care or the Head of Junior School, as appropriate, to any pattern of unacceptable absence.
  6. Transfer unsatisfactory attendance information to students' files (Year Coordinator)
  7. Should a pattern of non-attendance cause staff to have concerns for a student's welfare, they will notify the Principal of their concerns and he will follow the Child Protection protocols.
  8. Exemptions from Attendance - The school follows the guidelines followed by the DEC and those legislated in 2012 with regards to parents asking for Exemption / Extended Leave - Travel from attendance. Parents are asked to fill out the proforma that is found on the school's website <https://www.covenant.nsw.edu.au/community/information-forms>
  9. Parents will receive an answer of approval or refusal using a modified form of the Certificate for Exemption / Extended Leave - Travel developed for DEC schools. Should the approval not be granted notice will be given in writing in time for the parent to appeal the decision in writing and/or in person according to the principles of procedural fairness which are followed in all similar matters.

## Appendix 1

### **Electronic signatures**

Based on legal advice, the school will accept emailed absence notes and electronic signatures on notes, but strongly prefer hand written notes. We do not routinely send an SMS to parents about absences but apart from that proviso, we will take care to ensure the legitimacy of any electronic signature.

Due to the prevalence of email as a form of communication we sought legal advice from Prolegis, our legal advisors, and their reply is reproduced below:

“We understand that you are already satisfied, and we have confirmed, that the Board of Studies permits the register of daily attendances to be maintained in electronic form (see paragraph 3.8 of the Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual). This includes the documentation provided to substantiate the reasons for absences, including parent notifications.

Previously, a note would be signed by the parent. However, The *Electronic Transactions Act 1999* (Cth) and the NSW equivalent, allows for transactions to take place and ‘signatures’ to be provided entirely electronically.

### **What are the general principles of the duty of care owed by the school and teachers to students?**

It is common knowledge that at common law teachers owe a duty of care to students. Traditionally, this means that a teacher’s duty is to take such care of the children as a careful parent would take of this or her own children and that the standard of care is that of the reasonably prudent parent. Schools hold a non-delegable duty of care to students, which is a duty to see that care is taken of the students.

The duty of care may extend outside school hours if the school has assumed responsibility for the pupil. The duty to each student has to be individually considered if there was a foreseeable risk of injury outside the school grounds after school hours.

If there is a failure to discharge the duty of care, it may require those charged with the care liable to compensate students or any other person suffering injury or damage as a result.

### **What are the risks to the school of using electronic media to communicate absence notes?**

If the schools allow email or the VPN portal to be used to communicate student absences, it must protect against the risks of interference with the integrity of the communication, such as student forgery. Given the ease of access by students to technology today and their high technology skill levels, there are risks that students may improperly send the absence note without the parents’ knowledge or consent. For example, the students could use the parents’ email address or another email address to send the absence note, or use a parent’s password to gain access to and send the absence note through the VPN portal.

In addition, there are risks that a student, having forged an absence note, is injured while outside the school grounds and without the approval or knowledge of their parents. It is unlikely in these circumstances that the school would be held liable provided they take reasonable measures to address the risks. Consequently, the risks of forgery occurring should be reduced or eliminated to a reasonable extent.

## What steps can the schools take to reduce the risk of forgery?

In order to reduce the risks of a compromise to the integrity of the absence note and to alleviate the risk of forgery, the school could:

- Have a procedures in place for parents sending absence notes via electronic communication and for the school checking and verifying the integrity of these communication (see below); and
- Follow these procedures.

The procedures could, amongst other things, specify:

- that the absence note should be sent from the email address which the parent has authorised for this purpose and which is on-file with the school
- where an absence note is received, the school should check their files to see if there is a pattern of absences for the particular student and scrutinize and verify these absences more closely
- ideally, in every case, send an SMS or email to the parent who allegedly sent the absence note to confirm the child's absence. This should be sent to the SMS or email address on record with the school
- students and parents could have separate passwords for the VPN portal; access to the absence notes section of the VPN portal could be restricted to parent use only (i.e. with a parent password); encourage parents not to share their passwords to the VPN portal with students; encourage the parents to change their password if they become aware that their child is using or knows the parent's password
- what is to be included in the absence note (similar to what was included in the paper format).

If it is not possible or practicable to send an SMS or email in every case, send an SMS or email to the parent to verify the child's absence on a routine or random basis or where there is suspicion that the note may have been written by the student, such as:

- Where the email address on the absence note does not match with the parent email address on file;
- Where the absence note has clues that it may have been written by the student, such as the writing style, word use, grammar, spelling, etc.; and
- Where there is a track record of absences from the relevant student

All parents should be notified in writing of the change to electronic absence notes, and the procedures to be followed. Another option, which is applicable especially in schools where there may not be a large uptake in the use of email by parents, is to obtain parent consent to allow absence notes to be sent by electronic communication. Whilst this may be impractical to obtain in the short term, it could be included in the terms and conditions signed by the parent when enrolling new students or included as part of annual information collection form for existing students."

## Appendix 2

**Exemptions from Attendance forms:**

**All forms are available at:**

<https://www.covenant.nsw.edu.au/community/information-forms>

- **Absent Note proforma- Absence from school**
- **Absent Note proforma- late to school**
- **Application for Extended Leave Proforma- 5 days or more**

### Appendix 3

Absence note proforma (available on the website at:  
<https://www.covenant.nsw.edu.au/community/information-forms>)



Parent absent note  
pro forma.pdf

### Appendix 4

#### Contact details for relevant support personnel – 2019

##### School Counsellors and Advisers

- Mrs Deb Redwood - Counsellor and Chaplain: Monday - Wednesday
- Mr Richard Grey – Monday – Friday
- Mrs Amy Thompson – Wednesday and Friday
- Mrs Wendy Gilbert - Career Adviser: Monday, Tuesday and Thursday

##### Police Liaison

##### Youth Liaison Officer

- Senior Constable Robyn Jennings - 9976 8051

### Appendix 5

#### NEW SOUTH WALES ATTENDANCE REGISTER CODES

Our data base system Edumate uses a series of coloured crosses for the daily lesson attendance or absence of students. These are shown below.

##### Period Attendance legend...

 Present	 Absence - Unexplained	 Absent Suspended	 Other Activity
 Late to class	 Absence - Unverified Explanation	 Sign Out	 Pastoral Care
 Late to class (Signed in)	 Absence - Verified Explanation	 Discipline	 In Sickbay
 No Status Recorded	 Absence - Verified Due to Sickness	 On Event	
 No timetabled lesson	 Absence - Verified Exempt	 Music lesson	

However, in the Approve Attendance section of Edumate the Attendance codes can clearly be seen and can be accessed at any time. This section is closed off at the end of each term, or within two weeks of the following term.



The embedded document gives a snapshot of the codes used.