Mid North Christian College
Hope in the Living God

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Student Attendance Policy and Procedure

Purpose

This policy describes Mid North Christian College's practices for monitoring and managing student attendance. The purpose of this Policy is to assist students to receive the maximum benefit from education through regular attendance, and that Mid North Christian College is fulfilling its legal obligations regarding student attendance.

Background

Parents and schools work in partnership to provide learning opportunities to build a solid foundation for the future. Regular school attendance is a shared responsibility between parents, students, and schools. Schools are required to ensure that enrolled students are attending school or participating in an approved learning program. Schools are also required to maintain appropriate attendance registers.

Guiding Principles

Principles that guide this policy are:

- Continuity of relationships and learning in an educational program is underpinned by consistent attendance
- Attendance is a shared responsibility between the staff of schools, parents, students and members of the wider community
- Participation in educational programs can play an important role in fostering the development of personal and social skills.

Policy Objectives

Mid North Christian College's Student Attendance Policy aims to support the following outcomes:

- Improvement in student attendance and participation as shown in the data collected by the College;
- Improvement in learning outcomes as measured by College assessment processes;
- Increased understanding of the importance of regular attendance by the community of educators, learners, and families of Mid North Christian College;
- Annual reporting to the College's community and educational authorities on attendance;
- Ongoing analysis of attendance data, which informs continuous school improvement; and
- Development, implementation, and monitoring of procedures based on the analysis of data to improve attendance.

Student Attendance Legislated Obligations

Children of compulsory school age (six years and up to the age of 16 years) residing in South Australia are required to be in full-time attendance at a government or registered non-government school unless an exemption has been granted.

Students of compulsory education age (between 16 and 17 years) are required to be in attendance at school or a combination of school and other approved training unless an exemption has been granted.

In meeting its legislated obligations, Mid North Christian College is required to maintain attendance rolls and enrolment registers and may be required to produce these upon request by the Education Standards Board, as part of

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the registration process, and to State and Australian governments to ensure accountability for the receipt of government funding.

The College is also required to publish attendance data as part of the School Performance Information and participate in attendance reporting processes including the Australian Government student attendance data collection (STATS) and the State Government requirement to report unauthorised absences of 10 or more days in a term on a termly basis.

PROCEDURE

Responding to, Reporting and Monitoring Absences

Mid North Christian College has an obligation to follow up the extended absence from school of students under the age of compulsion and has developed a number of targeted and specific actions it will take in response to student absences:

- Unexplained absences are followed up in an appropriate manner with the student and/or their parent/caregiver. Mid North Christian College has an obligation to follow up the extended absence from school of students under the compulsion age. In certain circumstances, the College may need to seek the assistance of external agencies, such as the Association of Independent Schools of South Australia (AISSA) or the Department for Education's Social Work Truancy Service in responding to an extended absence;
- A medical certificate may be requested for any absence for medical reasons in excess of three days;
- Mid North Christian College will notify the parent in an appropriate manner where a student has a poor record of school or class attendance;
- The attendance issue and any action taken is recorded, as appropriate, in the student file when unsatisfactory class or school attendance is identified;
- The College will maintain ongoing communication with parents/caregivers regarding curriculum activities and events when a student is unable to attend school for an extended period due to injury or illness. The College may provide a modified educational program to assist with recovery, where appropriate;
- Permission will be sought from the College when parents wish to remove their child from class during term time for the purposes of leisure, family travel or holiday or non-school related activities. An exemption application must/will/may be submitted when absences longer than five days are planned. Exemptions are not automatically granted and are dependent on a decision by the Principal; and
- In cases of ongoing student absenteeism, Mid North Christian College will implement strategies aimed at restoring a student's attendance to a satisfactory level in accordance with the Student Attendance Policy, such as an attendance improvement plan which outlines agreed actions and the persons responsible.

Exemptions

If a parent wishes to take their child out of the College temporarily, they are required to apply for an exemption from school attendance. To apply for an exemption, the parent/caregiver must contact Reception for an application for exemption form.

Form A

Approval can be given by the Principal for an exemption up to 12 months for reasons of family travel/holiday and for a period of up to one month for reason of ongoing medical condition and other/conditional. When absences longer than five days are planned for reasons of family travel/holiday, a formal exemption application is to be submitted.

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If for more than one month, and up to 12 months, for reasons other than travel/family holiday, the application requires approval by the central delegate, which for Mid North Christian College, is the AISSA Chief Executive.

Form B

This is an application for exemption from school enrolment/attendance and education enrolment/participation. Students under 15 years of age cannot be given permanent exemption. Students aged 16 and over do not need an exemption if they can provide evidence to the College that they are participating in an approved learning program for example:

- Attending TAFE or other courses; or
- Doing an apprenticeship or traineeship

Students aged 15 and 16 years who are taking up full-time employment can apply for permanent exemption from the College. To qualify:

- Students under 16 years must be working more than 30 hours per week; and
- 16-year-olds must be working more than 25 hours per week.

Evidence (such as letters or emails from employers or training organisations) must be submitted with the application for exemptions from the College.

Form B is also used Elite Sports, Oversees Exchange and Family travel/holiday for more than 12 months.

Form C

This is conditional or part-time attendance application form. While part-time attendance is outside the regulations, there are exceptional and negotiated circumstances where it may be approved. Examples include disability, behaviour or health/medical. This exemption is distinct from the normal exemption process in that it addresses the requirement for documentation and case-planning for student programs which would require the student to attend only part of the day/week.

The intent of any conditional exemption is to have the student transitioning back to full-time attendance over the period of the exemption. This will only be approved for genuine reasons which preclude full-time attendance, and only then wit supporting evidence.

At least one or all of the following should be attached to the application:

- A documented plan;
- Planned review process, including a timeline demonstrating how time at the school will increase; and
- ILP or draft meeting minutes, parent letters or information from other support agencies involved.

Principals can approve this arrangement for up to one month. For a period greater than one month, a conditional exemption must be applied for and approved by the AISSA Chief Executive.

Application Process

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The 'Exemption from School Application Form ED175' Form A, B or C must be completed. All forms must be signed by all parties. Supporting evidence that is required, must be attached to the exemption application.

Application Approval Process

The College is required to ensure that the appropriate form is fully completed and supporting evidence is obtained from the student's parents/guardians. The application form and supporting evidence are to be emailed to the AISSA Chief Executive. If approved, a confirmation letter will be mailed to the College and the parents/guardians of the exempt student. The letter will confirm the start and end date and the conditions of the exemption. If required, AISSA will contact the College to request additional information to support the exemption.

Procedures and Strategies for Monitoring and Managing Attendance

Mid North Christian College will implement the following procedures and strategies to monitor and manage student attendance:

- Homegroup teacher does the roll on SEQTA (8.43-8.45am)
- If a teacher knows the reason for a student will be away is or is away for a particular reason, they are to communicate this to Student Services as soon as possible.
- Student Services Officer checks rolls class by class on SEQTA (after 9.00am)
    - Lists students who are absent
    - If a student was absent the previous day, the reason is noted and how many days in a row they have been absent (SMS not sent out at this point)
    - If it is their first day absent, it is noted for later reference
    - Once all homegroups have been checked, reasons are recorded on SEQTA for known absences based on information gathered
    - For all the absences with unknown reasons, an Absent SMS is sent out asking parents for a reason and those students are marked as an 'unresolved absence'
    - As replies are received throughout the day, they are noted on SEQTA accordingly
- After 3 days of consecutive unresolved absences, Absence Letter 1 is sent home (via email), a copy is saved on the Intranet and a pastoral note is written saying a letter has gone home. When the pastoral note is saved, it is shared with Wellbeing Officer and classroom teacher (the note automatically goes to coordinators and Principal). The letter is copied and pasted into the student's SEQTA file.
- If no response received after 2 more days, the Homegroup teacher is asked to follow up with a phone call. (Homegroup teacher writes a pastoral note on SEQTA with the outcome and is shared with Student Services & Wellbeing Officer)
- After 7 days of unresolved absences where no reason or response has been received, Absence Letter 2 is sent via email. The letter is saved as mentioned above and a pastoral note written and saved on the student's SEQTA file.
- For 3-5 consecutive days absent for medical reasons, Absence letter 1 is sent via email and an SMS requesting a medical certificate for our records is also sent.

Attendance Improvement Planning

Mid North Christian College will facilitate a collaborative process whereby issues relating to a student's inability to attend the College are identified and strategies to increase attendance are determined. An Attendance Improvement Plan is the documented outcome of the planning process.

Attendance improvement planning requires collaboration between the student, parents/caregivers, class teacher/s and other College personnel, such as members of the Wellbeing team. This may also involved external support

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professionals. Wherever possible, these meetings are to be conducted face-to-face. The Principal will be provided with relevant documentation and may be involved in the process.

Mid North Christian College will work develop appropriate strategies as part of this planning process and they will be documented and signed by the parties involved. Two documents that may assist in this planning process are the 'Graduated Increase Attendance Plan' or the 'Return to School Rubric'. Both of these can be tailored to the individual's needs and situation.

An attendance improvement plan will be reviewed regularly as required according to the needs of the student, however at a minimum, monthly.

Making a mandatory notification for non-attendance

Mid North Christian College is committed to ensuring that the advice and steps outlined in the South Australian Department for Child Protection Mandatory Reporting Guide will be followed when there are suspicions that a child or young person has been harmed, or is at risk of harm and:

- The student is persistently absent from or not enrolled in school, with no satisfactory explanation;
- Interventions have been attempted with student and family; and
- The non-attendance has continued despite the intervention attempts.

Requesting Student Support Services – Social Work Truancy Support

In some instances, the College may access the Department for Education's Student Support Services which offers a truancy social work service. Support will be requested when the absence meets, at minimum, the criteria of chronic non-attendance (10 or more days absent per term for any reason) and:

- The absences are ongoing and no reason has been provided by the parent or caregiver; or
- There is a pattern of concerning absences; and
- Despite multiple school interventions, there has been no improvement in attendance.

When requesting support, Mid North Christian College will:

- Ensure all actions required prior to requesting support have been completed prior to contact;
- Ensure that the Principal and the relevant Heads of Schools are aware of request for support;
- Contact (email/phone) the local Department Office Social Work – Truancy team to request support; and
- Provide a signed copy of the form 'ED171 – Non-government School Request for Student Support Services Social Work – Truancy', which can be found on the AISSA website under Compliance Framework.

Requesting a SA Police (SAPOL) Wellbeing Check

Mid North Christian College may request SA Police (SAPOL) involvement for a wellbeing check or address check only when all other possible courses of action have been taken, including:

- Including continued attempts to re-engage the student with education;
- Extensive efforts have been made to reach out to the family, such as contacting relatives, emergency contacts, neighbours, or other organisations associated with the family; and

- Other agencies involved with the family have also been unsuccessful in sighting the child or young person.

The SAPOL request must be authorised by the Principal of Mid North Christian College. After the check is completed, the College will request the SAPOL report number and a brief report on the outcome of the check by SAPOL. The details of this will be recorded on the student's file in SEQTA.

If there is a serious and immediate threat to the child or young person's safety and wellbeing, then triple zero (000) is to be called, or a mandatory notification to the Child Abuse Report Line (CARL – 13 14 78) should be made if there are child protection concerns.

Responsibilities

All members of the Mid North Christian College community, including the Principal, College staff, students, and parents, each have their own obligations relating to student attendance. This section of the Policy will outline the responsibility of these members of the school community and the management of associated issues.

The Principal

The Principal is responsible for ensuring that processes are in place to:

- Promote the importance of attendance;
- Maintain attendance records as per the College's legislated obligations;
- Develop and implement attendance improvement plans;
- Monitor and analyse attendance data and report to the school community through the College's appropriate reporting mechanisms;
- Follow up on non-attendance, including parent notifications;
- Ensure intervention between the student and the College after a period of accumulated absence (10 days may be a guide) or sooner if the student has a poor attendance record;
- Make referral to, and seek support from, agencies and support services when a student's pattern of attendance becomes irregular;
- Ensure that the analysis of data is used effectively to inform action at the College;
- Ensure that notifications about suspicions of neglect and/or abuse are made;
- Meet all Australian Government and State Government legislative compliance and the school's duty of care obligations.

Staff

Staff of Mid North Christian College have a responsibility to support the agreed Student Attendance Policy and will:

- Provide a learning program that seeks to engage all students and offers opportunity for success, thus encouraging regular attendance;
- Record attendance and absences according to the College's requirements;
- Contribute to the analysis of attendance trends and the development and implementation of College attendance improvement plans;
- Implement College procedures, including parent notification, to follow up non-attendance;

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- Work with parents and associated agencies to support learners' regular attendance in the education program; and
- Make Mandatory Notifications as appropriate.

Students

Students enrolled at Mid North Christian College have a responsibility for their attendance. The level of responsibility will be determined by the individual circumstances of the child.

The College has expectations that the student will:

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

Parents

Parents must enrol their child in an education program from six years of age (the age of compulsion). When enrolling their child, parents accept the responsibility to:

- 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 College whenever their child is absent.
- Agree to the terms of an exemption as required; and
- Work with the College on intervention strategies to improve attendance.

Legislative Context

Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)
Education and Children's Services Act 2019 (SA)
Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011 (SA)
Education (Compulsory Education Age) Amendment Act 2007 (SA)
Standards for Registration and Review of Registration of Schools in South Australia, 2019

END OF POLICY

Authorisations

Policy Reviewer: Principal Rachel Richardson
Approval by: Board and CLT
Board Approval required: Yes
New or Revised Policy: New
Approved date of Policy: 31/8/23
Next Review date: End of 2025
Last Updated: 23/8/23