

# **East Hills Public School**



## **School Attendance Policy and Procedures**

## **Rationale**

East Hills Public School is 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.

East Hills Public School expects all children to be at school each day. We expect students to be on time for the bell at 9.00 am.

East Hills 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. East Hills 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 truancing 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 (NESAS) 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, See Saw, Skool bag 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 requested 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 and the learning support team.
- who have concerns about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person will report their concerns to the learning and support team or 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, 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 weekly for staff members to follow up. Staff identify students at weekly team meetings for follow 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 have been developed 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. The Assistant Principals are responsible 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 the principals will, 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 will 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 2 days** or a pattern of absences has been identified, East Hills Public School will take the following actions:

- Class Teacher will make contact with the parent to receive an explanation (via phone, or See Saw)
- 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 East Hills 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 Booklets 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/See Saw.

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

## **Unsatisfactory Patterns of Absence: School Follow-up**

At East Hills 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 will 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 all school based interventions have been unsuccessful in resolving attendance difficulties the principal will 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 will be arranged to discuss the health care needs of the child.
- The principal will 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.
- When the principal has 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.
- When the principal has 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 will consider whether the habitual absence or parental attitude places the child or young person at suspected risk of harm.

- The principal will 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 East Hills 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 will 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.
- The principal will 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 the principal considers that the travel is appropriate during school term, the principal will 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.
- The principals will request travel documentation, such as travel itinerary or e-ticket, and ensure this is attached to the application.
- The principals will 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* on the Department's website
- 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 DoE 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 will ensure the parents are contacted to establish the whereabouts of the student. If contact is not established then the principal will follow processes associated with an Application for Home School Liaison Program support.
- On accepting a parent's Application a Certificate of Extended Leave - Travel will 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 and an application and certificate can be downloaded from the Department Website.

## **Student Whereabouts Unknown**

Students who are 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 will be 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 will:
  - 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 will 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 will be 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.

## **When should a student's name be removed from the school's Attendance Register?**

Students are removed from the attendance register by having their enrolment status changed in ERN. Students must/will not have their enrolment status changed in ERN unless one of the following circumstances applies:

- Advice has been received from parents that the student is enrolled in a non-government or other registered school. The school will request that the parent provide the name of the non-government or other register school so that the enrolment can be confirmed through email or phone contact.
- The status of the student will not be changed in ERN (ie the student should not be marked as 'Left') until confirmation of enrolment is received from the enrolling school. In cases where confirmation has not been received, all measure will be taken to attempt to confirm enrolment details measures can include contacting the school provided by the parent, requests under Chapter 16A, appropriate contact with the Child Wellbeing Unit if there are concerns for the safety, welfare or wellbeing of the student, or reports to the Child Protection Helpline if there are significant risk of harm concerns.
- Written confirmation provided to the school by the parent including a Registration Number from NESAs  
Which indicates the student has been registered for home schooling. Where the principal has only received  
Verbal advice from parents regarding registration for home schooling they will contact attendance officers who will verify the information by checking the databases provided by NESAs. Principals will only mark as 'Left' once the student's registration is verified.

- Students who have moved out of New South Wales and have not applied for a cross-border enrolment in New South Wales. The information will be requested from the parent regarding the interstate residential address, or name of school in which the parent intends to enrol the student so that confirmation of enrolment can be sought.
- Students who have been expelled from East Hills Public School in accordance with the Department's ***Suspension and expulsion of School Student – Procedures***. The students enrolment status will not be changed to Left – Expelled in ERN until issues regarding the students educational placement has been resolved and the new enrolment confirmed.

### ***What are the requirements for students leaving the school grounds During school hours?***

In all government school students are required to be issued with a leave pass if they are leaving the school during school hours.

- Parents/ carers are required to go to the front office when entering the school to pick up their child/ carers and obtain a leave pass which they present to the class teacher and the student will be released into the care of the parent/carer.
- The student's departure time will be recorded into their attendance record.

### ***What are the requirements for students arriving after school has started?***

If a student arrives after the 9.00 am bell they are required to go to the front office and request a late note which the student presents to the class teacher upon entering the classroom.

- The student's arrival time will be recorded into their attendance record.



