

Malek Fahd Islamic School Limited

ABN 41 003 864 891



Student Attendance Policy & Procedures

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Implementation of this policy is **mandatory**. The Head of Campus has overall responsibility for its implementation on the campus.

POLICY OWNER:

Deputy Principal Wellbeing & Community

VERSION CONTROL

Version No	Date	Details	Approved by
V1.0	3 April 2019	CompliSpace policy	Principal (Bruce Rixon)
V2.0	19 June 2023	Revised	Principal (Dr Zachariah Matthews)

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The NSW Education Act 1990 (the Education Act) requires all students of compulsory school age to be enrolled in and attend school unless they are registered for home schooling. Under the Education Act and the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) registration requirements, independent schools are responsible for monitoring, recording, and following up student absences as well as implementing intervention strategies to improve student engagement and school attendance.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

The NSW Education Act (1990) (Education Act) sets out requirements for enrolment and attendance of students at school in NSW. Children of compulsory school-age are required to be enrolled in, and attend, school or be registered for home schooling (section 22 of the Education Act). In NSW, the compulsory school age is from the age of 6 to 17. However, a child under the age of 17 ceases to be of compulsory school age if they have completed Year 10 and are enrolled in approved education or engaged in training, or paid work (or a combination of these) on a full-time basis (an average of 25 hours per week) (section 21B of the Education Act).

DEFINITIONS

It is important to clarify the multifaceted nature of school absences by differentiating the various terms that are often used interchangeably and to delineate the different terms as they represent different behaviours and motivators. Kearney (2008)¹ defined absences as the following categories:

- **Absenteeism** – defined as any form of absence from school or class.
- **School refusal** – refers to when a child or young person refuses to attend school and/or has problems remaining in class for an entire day and is anxiety-based (e.g. separation, generalised or social anxiety driven). It can present as extended absences from school, periodic absences from school, missed classes or chronic tardiness with the child or young person experiencing intense dread (or anxiety) about school that precipitates pleas for future non-attendance. Parents/carers are aware of school refusal absences and no attempt by the child is made to conceal these absences.
- **Chronic school refusal** – defined as missing 15 school days in an academic year or missing at least 10% of school days at some point of the academic year.
- **Truancy** – refers to concealed absences by the child or young person, without parents'/carers' knowledge. Truancy is not anxiety-based and usually involves the child or young person engaging in alternate behaviours.
- **School withdrawal** – refers to when parents/carers deliberately keep a child away from school for various reasons including family illness, parental conflict or family holidays.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/CARERS

Legally, it is the responsibility of the parent or carer of a child of compulsory school age, not the school, to ensure that their child is enrolled in, and attending school, or is registered for home schooling. Once enrolled, children are required to attend school each day the school is open. It is an offence under the Education Act (section 23) if a parent/carers does not meet the legal obligation in relation to the enrolment and attendance of their child(ren) at school or registration for home schooling.

SCHOOL REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Schools and principals have legal obligations in relation to attendance under the Education Act (Part 5 and section 47(g)(iv)) and NESA's school registration requirements outlined in NESA's Registered and Accredited Individual Non-government Schools (NSW) Manual (sections 3.6.2 and 3.8). MFIS is required to have policies and procedures for school registration that address the following school responsibilities in relation to attendance:

- maintaining registers of enrolments and daily attendance
- recording and monitoring daily attendance/absence of students
- following up student absences
- processing applications for exemption from attendance or enrolment
- monitoring attendance data
- implementing intervention strategies to improve unsatisfactory attendance.

ENROLMENT REGISTER

MFIS maintains a register of enrolments that includes details of each student currently and previously enrolled at the school. When a student leaves the school, the date the enrolment ceased and the student's destination (i.e., next educational setting) must be recorded in the enrolment register. If the destination of a student, under the age of 17, exiting the school is unknown, or the school is not satisfied with the information provided about the student's destination, the school must notify the NSW Department of Education using the student destination unknown form available in the AISNSW Resource Centre.

- The enrolment register is maintained by the campus admin staff under the supervision of the Head of Campus and cross-campus Admin Manager.
- The following data is recorded upon enrolment: name, age, address, the name and contact details of parent/carer, date of enrolment and, for students older than 6 years old, previous school or pre-enrolment situation.
- The campus admin staff will collect, and record student leaving data (date and destination) and notify the NSW Department of Education when a student's destination is unknown. The Head of Campus is responsible for ensuring that the department is notified.

REGISTER OF DAILY ATTENDANCE

MFIS is required to monitor the attendance of every student enrolled at the school each day to identify and record any absences in an electronic register of daily attendance. The attendance register identifies both full and partial absences, and for partial absences, the time the student arrived or left the school.

A student has an absence if they are not present on the school's premises. This includes where there is a variation to the student's attendance, for example where the student is engaging in their schooling at another location such as during an excursion.

For each absence from the school, the attendance register must indicate the reason for the absence, including a variation to attendance, using attendance codes approved by the NSW Minister for Education. On days where the school is closed other day other than an a public holiday, the principal has the discretion to determine the Minister's code that will be recorded in the attendance register for the absence.

MFIS is also required to maintain records of documentation to substantiate the reason for the absence. This may include communication from parents/carers (including letters, emails, SMS responses and file notes) or documentation from medical practitioners, specialists, or other authorities.

- The Primary Class Teacher or Secondary Homeroom Teacher records daily attendance electronically.
- The Primary Class Teacher monitors attendance throughout the day and Secondary Subject Teacher records Period by Period attendance and follows up truancy.
- The register of daily attendance must be retained for a period of 7 years after the last entry.
- When a student arrives late to school, they must check in at the campus office first to get a late note.
- When a student leaves school before dismissal time, the parent must provide an explanation either written, electronically or by phone to the campus office.
- The campus admin staff will inform the class/subject teacher of the early dismissal.
- A parent or carer must go to the campus office to sign out their child if they are departing school early.
- Early dismissals will not be allowed without an explanation from a parent/carer.
- Late arrival and early dismissal are recorded in Sentral as partial absence.

FOLLOWING UP STUDENT ABSENCES

MFIS is required to follow up unexplained absences with parents/carers, notify them regarding poor attendance and maintain records of unsatisfactory attendance in student files. The principal or delegate has the discretion to decline a reason provided for an absence if he is not satisfied with the reason provided or do not think the absence is in the best interest of the student. The principal or delegate can request parents/carers provide documentation to substantiate the reason for the absence.

If a reason for an absence has not been provided within 7 days of the date of the absence, or has not been accepted by the principal, the school must record the absence as unexplained or unjustified. Even where an absence is recorded as unexplained, schools should continue to follow up the reason for the absence with the parents/carers.

- After rolls are marked and submitted in Sentral, the campus admin will send an SMS to parents between 9am and 9:30am each day to follow up unexplained absences.
- If the absence remains unexplained, the Primary Class Teacher or Secondary Homeroom Teacher will follow up the reason for the absence and update the electronic record. Absent notes, medical certificates, etc., must be sent to the campus admin for filing.
- If a student is absent for three (3) days consecutively with the absence unexplained, then for primary students the primary class teacher and for secondary students the campus admin (at Greenacre Secondary, the Year Advisors) will contact the family to enquire about the absence. A record of this family contact must be made in Sentral.
- If a student is absent for five (5) days consecutively with the absence still unexplained, then the Primary Grade/Stage Coordinator or Secondary Year Advisor/Wellbeing Coordinator will contact the family to enquire about the absence. A record of this family contact must be made in Sentral.
- Truancy: The Primary Class Teacher monitors attendance throughout the day and the Secondary Subject Teacher records Period by Period attendance and follows up truancy. The Class/ Subject Teacher must immediately notify the Primary Stage Coordinator/Wellbeing Coordinator or Secondary Wellbeing Coordinator or Deputy Head of Campus if a student is absent from class truanting.
- It is important that all attempts to contact family must be recorded in Sentral.

LEAVE

In general, MFIS does not approve leave during the school term. Arrangements for family holidays and special events should be made during the term breaks and summer holidays. However, consideration is given to unusual circumstances, if the school believes approved leave is in the best interest of the student.

- The parent/carer should submit a request for leave using the appropriate form to the campus office. Any relevant documents should be included in the application for leave.
- The completed form should be submitted at least 8 weeks prior to the leave date.
- The Head of Campus will review the application and submit a request for approval to the Principal. Only the Principal can approve a student's extended leave during school term.
- If the leave is not approved and the student still takes leave, the absences is recorded as unjustified/unapproved leave in Sentral and may affect the student's ongoing enrolment.
- During leave without approval, the school is not obligated to provide schoolwork to the student.

EXEMPTION FROM ATTENDANCE OR ENROLMENT

Under section 25 of the Education Act students may be eligible for an exemption from enrolment or attendance in accordance with the Exemptions from Attendance and Enrolment – Guidelines for Independent Schools. Grounds for exemptions may include:

- exemption from enrolment:
 - age (in certain circumstances for children turning 6, but not exceeding 6 months after the child's 6th birthday)
 - students who have completed Year 9 but not yet completed Year 10 and who have secured a full-time apprenticeship or traineeship
- exemption from attendance:
 - exceptional circumstances
 - direction under the Public Health Act 2010
 - employment in the entertainment industry
 - participation in elite arts or elite sporting events.

A child may be exempt from attending school if the Minister for Education (or delegate) is satisfied that conditions exist which make it necessary or desirable. Independent school principals have been delegated authority by the Minister for Education to grant exemptions in some circumstances. Parents/carers are required to make an application for exemption to the school in advance of the period being sought, with the exception of an exemption under the Public Health Act where no application is required.

Details of the conditions for which an exemption may be granted and the delegations for granting exemptions are outlined in the Exemptions from Attendance and Enrolment – Guidelines for Independent Schools (the Attendance Enrolment Exemption Guidelines) available in the AISNSW Resource Centre.

MONITORING ATTENDANCE DATA

MFIS is required to monitor attendance data to identify students at risk of poor attendance or for whom there are attendance concerns, for example unsatisfactory or irregular attendance or patterns of absence.

- At MFIS the following methods are used to monitor attendance data:
 - The Primary Class Teacher or Secondary Homeroom Teacher records attendance daily, and monitors attendance.
 - The Primary Grade/Stage Coordinators and Secondary Year Advisors/Wellbeing Coordinators review attendance reports weekly to discuss at regular departmental meetings so students at risk can be promptly identified and supported.
 - Attendance reports should be analysed to investigate trends such as
 - days of the week, assessment periods, times of the year, year levels, gender or groups;
 - track individual student attendance over time and monitor academic progress;
 - analyse patterns of reasons provided for irregular attendance if a student's absence begins to accumulate;
 - review data from previous terms, or year, or school to target students for improvement.
- The Primary Stage Coordinators/Wellbeing Coordinators and Secondary Wellbeing Coordinators will identify students at risk. The Head of Campus or Deputy Head of Campus is responsible for ensuring that students at risk are identified.

IDENTIFYING ATTENDANCE CONCERNS

MFIS has established systematic processes for timely identification of students whose attendance may be of concern. Through proactively monitoring the attendance of all students, MFIS can promptly identify indicators that may reveal potential attendance concerns.

Indicators that a student may be at risk can include:

- patterns of absence, for example:
 - habitual lateness
 - regularly leaving school early
 - multiple single day absences over a term
 - absences that regularly occur on Mondays, after holidays, school camps or sports days
- unexplained absences
- tearfulness, tantrums or clinginess upon arriving at school or repeated pleas to go home
- frequent complaints of illness while at school and requests to go to the sick bay.

Processes for monitoring attendance data, in combination with student wellbeing processes, enable early identification of students at risk, so targeted intervention can be provided before the student's absenteeism becomes chronic. Issues which are addressed in a timely manner are more receptive to intervention and are more likely to result in a satisfactory outcome for the student.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

MFIS is required to implement whole school, proactive strategies designed to support student engagement in school and learning across the school that leads to regular school attendance. MFIS is also required to implement targeted intervention strategies to identify and support students at risk of developing attendance concerns.

- The Primary Stage Coordinators/Wellbeing Coordinators and Secondary Wellbeing Coordinators should implement targeted intervention strategies to support students at risk. The Head of Campus or Deputy Head of Campus is responsible for ensuring that s targeted intervention strategies are implemented.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT IMPROVED ATTENDANCE

If concerned about a student's attendance patterns, a prompt response is required.

- The Primary Class Teacher and Secondary Year Advisor/Wellbeing Coordinator will make the first contact with the family to discuss the attendance patterns that are of concern, and to understand the student's situation.
- The Primary Stage Coordinators/Wellbeing Coordinators and Secondary Wellbeing Coordinators will liaise with the school's learning support team, school counsellor or Chaplains to determine the ongoing support that may be needed for a student. It may be appropriate for the student and family to engage with external mental health services.
 - A pattern of regular communication with the parents/carers must be established. This is important to support and reassure families and to work with them to develop and implement a plan that will assist the student in attending school regularly. Keep the parents/carers well informed of the student's progress at school.

CHILD WELLBEING AND CHILD PROTECTION CONCERNS

School attendance issues can occur in the context of child wellbeing and child protection concerns and may occur as part of a picture of other concerns related to parenting vulnerabilities potentially leading to child abuse and neglect.

The NSW Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporters Guide (MRG) identifies attendance concerns under the Neglect Concern – Education: Habitual Absence. The MRG decision tree for educational neglect refers to situations where a 'child/young person is of compulsory school age AND is habitually absent'. Habitually absent is described as a minimum of 30 days absence within the past 100 school days. Other factors may warrant action to report earlier than the 30 days indicated (Keep Them Safe:

A shared approach to child wellbeing, 2009-2014). Where a school has a concern that a student may be at risk of significant harm, the school should follow its mandatory reporting procedures regardless of how many days the student has been absent.

If there are concerns the child is not enrolled and there are Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) indicators the MRG would also allow for reporting under the Neglect Concern - Education (not enrolled).

MFIS should follow its child protection policy and procedures where there is a concern that a student may be at risk of significant harm and should refer to the NSW Keep Them Safe Mandatory Reporters Guide (MRG) and/or contact the AISNSW Child Protection team for further advice.

WHOLE SCHOOL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

MFIS should create a positive and engaging climate by proactively adhering to and implementing a range of school-wide principles, practices and strategies that promote consistent and regular school attendance.

Strategies may include:

- Promoting high expectations for attendance facilitated through clear and consistent messaging across the whole school community (students, staff, parents/carers) through various forums.
- Creating a welcoming, engaging and safe environment for students helps students feel connected to their school and teachers.
- Fostering positive relationships with staff and peers can have a profound effect on students' wellbeing and resilience.

ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Attendance improvement planning is a collaborative process whereby issues relating to a student's inability to attend school are identified and strategies to increase attendance are determined. An Attendance Improvement Plan is the documented outcome of the planning process.

The Attendance Improvement Plan broadly identifies the specific barriers prohibiting the student from attending school and strategies to address those issues. This may relate to school refusal, school withdrawal, or truancy. Ideally the plan would be reviewed fortnightly, but a minimum would be monthly.

Attendance improvement planning requires collaboration between the student, parents/carers, class teacher/s and other school personnel. The Head of Campus or Deputy Head of Campus is responsible for ensuring that attendance improvement planning is done. It may also involve external support professionals such as psychologists, therapists and paediatricians.

If there is a known mental health issue, or there is evidence of an emerging mental health concern, the school should seek consent from the family to liaise/consult with appropriate external mental health services or providers. It is the information provided by specialist mental health care experts that will guide the attendance expectations and strategies discussed as part of the planning process.

Once the Attendance Improvement Plan has been developed, follow up communication is sent to the family, attaching a copy of the plan with the actions to be undertaken and a nominated review date.

In addition to the documented Attendance Improvement Plan, it may be preferable for the student to have a copy of a plan that is accessible to them.

A Graduated Increase Attendance Plan may also be used for the student to refer to. This plan details the student's timetable and documents the agreed attendance arrangements.

The AISNSW Return to School Rubric may be an alternative plan for students to refer to. The rubric focuses on particular areas of concern that are impacting on the student's attendance at school and can be tailored to their needs.

LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

On some occasions, despite undertaking the attendance improvement planning process and allowing time to monitor and review the agreed strategies, a student's attendance may not improve. In these instances, more formalised actions may proceed. The Education Act provides for the implementation of compulsory schooling conferences, compulsory schooling orders and ultimately prosecution.

- **Secretary's Compulsory Schooling Conference:** If satisfactory attendance is not achieved following implementation of an Attendance Improvement Plan, then a Compulsory Schooling Conference may be convened by a person authorised by the Secretary of the NSW Department of Education. The Compulsory Schooling Conference is the final school-based intervention that can be taken to address matters of unsatisfactory school attendance.

Conferencing:

- assists families to address poor school attendance without recourse to 'legal action'
- is part of a conciliatory process meant to identify issues impacting on school attendance
- develops strategies around poor school attendance
- is intended as a pre-court process to support families in restoring attendance before further legal action considered.

MFIS may refer the case to the Department of Education Legal Services to take further action where children of compulsory school age continue to have unacceptable, unexplained or unjustified absences from school, despite attempted interventions at the school level. AISNSW has authorised conveners who can conduct Compulsory Schooling Conferences on behalf of independent schools.

- **Compulsory Schooling Order:** If a student's attendance at school remains unsatisfactory following the Compulsory Schooling Conference process, the Department may apply to the Children's Court for a Compulsory Schooling Order.

The Children's Court magistrate may decide that a court-ordered Compulsory Schooling Conference to be convened.

- **Prosecution in the Local Court:** In circumstances where a breach of compulsory schooling orders occurs, further action may be taken against a parent in the Local Court. The result of court action can be the imposition of a community service order or a fine.

Sample letters for communicating with parents/carers about the purpose of these meetings are available from AISNSW.

The principal is responsible for implementing the above legal proceedings on the recommendation of the Head of Campus.