

Attendance policy

Overview

This is the department's attendance policy for all government schools. The policy describes the compulsory nature of education and underlines the responsibilities of all members of the school community to ensure children and young people are attending school. It also reflects research that indicates attendance at both preschool and school positively affects learning, wellbeing, employment and life outcomes for children and young people.

Scope

The purpose of this Attendance policy is to:

- reflect the intent of the Education Act 1972 (the Act) and the associated Education Regulations 2012 (the Regulations)
- guide the actions of all staff working with children and young people and their parents and caregivers on matters relating to school attendance and participation
- inform the development of associated guidelines and procedures for promoting, monitoring and reporting on attendance
- promote and support attendance in schools, preschools and other education and care settings
- reinforce parent and caregiver's obligations to ensure all children and young people are enrolled and attend school on every day that instruction is provided for the child at the school or approved learning program.

The policy applies to all government schools including:

- all departmental staff
- volunteers (as defined in the Volunteer policy) and providers of services for children and young people where:
 - any provision of service has an impact on a child or young person's attendance
 - a provider has an obligation to adopt the policy in accordance with the terms of their service agreement or contract with the department
- parents and caregivers of children and young people
- all children and young people of compulsory age
- all procedures, guidelines and strategies developed to support the attendance of children and young people.

There is no legal requirement for children under the age of 6 years or to young people over the age of 17 years to be engaged in schooling or an approved learning program.

The department acknowledges however that attendance at non-compulsory educational settings such as preschool and other education and care settings in a child's early years:

- plays a vital role in developing strong patterns of engagement and attendance with education
- helps develop routines and sets strong foundation for later learning
- builds children and young people's social capabilities
- prepares children and young people for successful participation in learning and the broader community.

It also allows for the provision of timely and strategic interventions before:

- children have fallen behind academically and socially
- families have disengaged
- family complexities interfere with children's participation in early learning.

Staff should therefore interact with children and young people and their families to optimise attendance in the same way as required for students who are of compulsory age.

This policy reinforces the position of the department to encourage, welcome and support all children and young people to access and participate in appropriate education and learning programs from early childhood through to primary, secondary and approved learning programs.

Out of scope

The policy does not apply where:

- a child or young person is exempt from attendance at school under the Act (for example under an approved exemption for a home education program)
- a child or young person is subject to a legal condition imposed by the South Australia Police, a court or an officer exercising a statutory authority that requires they be exempt from attendance.

Compulsory attendance requirements

The Act and the Regulations impose statutory responsibilities in relation to attendance at school. The Act requires that children must be enrolled in a school or approved learning program from the age of 6 years until they turn 17 years of age.

The Act also requires that a child must:

- attend the school at which they are enrolled on every day the school is open and at all school activities the school requires the child to attend, or
- participate in the approved learning program in which they are enrolled.

Parents have a responsibility under the Act to ensure their children attend school regularly. If a child or young person does not attend, without a 'prescribed reason' for their non-attendance or an approved exemption, their parents may be guilty of an offence.

Section 42 of the Regulations stipulates that:

- a leader's responsibilities include:
 - the management of the day-to-day operations of the school

- the welfare and development of the students.
- school staff responsibilities include:
 - being actively concerned with the welfare and development of the students in the teacher's care
 - participating in processes for determining school policies and properly implementing those policies
 - assisting in the general management of the school as required by the head teacher (principal).

The department's position is that the management of attendance is a central element of day-to-day operations and is essential to student learning and wellbeing. Therefore all department staff have a fundamental obligation to follow policy and procedures that ensure attendance by children and young people at school and encourage participation in preschool and other education and care opportunities.

Department staff have a duty of care which requires them to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable harm to students. This policy and its associated procedures outline the specific functions to be undertaken to fulfil this duty of care in respect of student attendance.

Authorised officers under the Act are required to exhaust all practical efforts to ensure attendance at school and approved learning programs by children and young people. They have specific powers to support this work. People who refuse to answer an authorised officer's questions or obstruct them in this work may be fined.

Compulsory school age

A child who is at least 6 years old but not yet 16 years of age is known as being of compulsory school age. Every child of compulsory school age is required to be enrolled at a government or non-government school and is required to fully participate in the education program arranged and approved by the enrolling school.

Compulsory education age

All young people between the ages of 16 and 17 are required to participate in an approved learning program until they turn 17 years, or until they have achieved an appropriate qualification under an approved learning program, whichever happens first. This is called compulsory education age.

Approved learning programs include:

- traditional schooling, including
 - SACE (South Australia Certificate of Education)
 - International Baccalaureate (IB)
 - Steiner Education (Waldorf Schools) Secondary Certificate
- Vocational Education Training (VET), Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses or accredited courses offered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)

- apprenticeships or traineeships
 - university degrees, diplomas or other university award courses
 - other programs authorised by the Minister (or delegate)
- or a combination of the above.

Starting school

The Minister for Education, under Regulation 63 of the Regulations, is able to determine whether, and at what times, children who are under 6 years of age may apply to be enrolled and admitted to that school.

The department's school and preschool enrolment policy and procedures state that children under the age of 6 years can enrol in a government school if:

- the child has turned 5 years of age before 1 May; to start school the first day of term 1 of that year
- the child has turned 5 years of age on or after 1 May; to start school the first day of term 1 of the following year.

While there is no legal requirement for children under the age of 6 years to be engaged in schooling or an approved learning program, there is an expectation that, once enrolled, children will attend on a regular basis to participate and complete their education program.

A child is legally required to be enrolled in a school by their 6th birthday.

Policy requirements

The policy requirements provide an overview of the department's commitment to actions which ensure attendance by children and young people at school and encourage participation in preschools and other education and care settings.

Shared understandings, collaborative development and promotion of attendance improvement practices are essential to support all members of the school community to positively influence children and young people's wellbeing, learning and life through attendance at education programs.

Attendance strategies must be purposeful and directed by the 6 core functions of attendance improvement:

- Promote the importance of education from the earliest years of life and throughout the schooling years as a school community priority of the highest value.
- Assess patterns of non-attendance and circumstances to inform the development of appropriate targeted, intensive and coordinated interventions.
- Actively engage and include all children, young people and their families in education and interventions which support attendance.
- Provide support to address the barriers to attendance, learning and wellbeing and ensuring inclusive support for children and young people so they can be physically present and engaged in education.

- Monitor attendance to ensure that risks are identified, supports are in place, and progress is monitored.
- Evaluate the need for further or ongoing interventions, referrals for external support and mandatory notifications.

These policy requirements must be documented in local Attendance Improvement Plans and implemented at a:

- universal level, incorporating whole school and classroom strategies
- targeted level for individuals or groups of children and young people
- intensive level for those children and young people requiring specialist support.

Review and refinement of practices which support these requirements must be undertaken as part of the preschool and school improvement planning cycle.

Roles and responsibilities

The department

Lead and manage South Australia's public education