## Background

## Schooling is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 – 17 years unless an exemption from attendance or enrolment is granted.

## Daily school attendance is important for all children and young people to succeed in education and to ensure they do not fall behind both socially and developmentally. Children and young people who regularly attend school and complete Year 12 or an equivalent qualification have better health outcomes, better employment outcomes, and higher incomes across their lives. It is important that children develop habits of regular attendance at an early age.

## School participation is important as it maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. School helps people develop important skills, knowledge and values that set them up for further learning and participation in their community.

## School context

This staged response to non-attendance is part of a whole-school approach to the engagement of students in their learning and school life. This document needs to be read in conjunction with:

* The school’s [Child Safe and Wellbeing Policy](https://kooweerupps.vic.edu.au/policies.html) - located on the school website.
* The school’s [Attendance Policy](https://kooweerupps.vic.edu.au/policies.html) - located on the school website.
* [Everyday Counts](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/participation/everydaycountsprimparent.pdf)
* [DET Attendance Guidelines](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/attendance/guidance)

Our attendance policy/student engagement policy sets out our shared responsibilities in promoting attendance and encouraging engagement and participation at a whole school level and on an individual level. Our policies recognise that effective monitoring and early intervention is crucial in managing non-attendance.

We are aware that chronic absences are commonly a sign of stress factors either in a student’s life outside school, and/or in the immediate learning environment. We also recognise the early warning signs for disengagement including poor attendance in primary school or kinder; frequent lateness, leaving school early, missing lessons, siblings with poor attendance, unresolved issues with staff or students, difficulties at times of transition, social or emotional issues, and chronic health issues in student and/or family members.

We acknowledge that responding quickly with offers to work in partnership with students and their families is the most effective way to manage non-attendance so that patterns do not become entrenched. For some comparison with particular cohorts or individual students in our school please see the attendance data attached.

## Data

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Average Rate of Student Attendance | | | | | | |
|  | **Year 1** | **Year 2** | **Year 3** | **Year 4** | **Year 5** | **Year 6** |
| Koo Wee Rup Primary | 89.1% | 91.1% | 91.5% | 89.6% | 89.3% | 83.9% |
| State Ave\* | 90.1% | 90.4% | 90.7% | 90.3% | 90.2% | 89.7% |

\* State Data from 2023. This State data can be found on the [ACARA](https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/student-attendance#:~:text=The%20attendance%20rate%20for%20students,up%20from%2049.9%25%20in%202022.) website.

**Non-attendance**

Non-attendance can be broadly categorised into three areas. These areas often overlap and are not clear-cut. It is important to develop an understanding of which of these areas particular cases of non-attendance fall under in order to put in place interventions that have the most chance of success.

**School refusal** - When a child or young person does not want, or actually refuses to go to school and involves a high level of stress and/or anxiety about school attendance.

Parents know their child is staying home over a prolonged period because the prospect of going to school causes them emotional distress. Parents generally support a return to school but may feel powerless and unsure about how to support their child. Parents often need specific strategies for managing the mornings with their children. There are different types of anxiety (for example separation anxiety or performance anxiety) that require different interventions therefore an assessment and treatment plan from a mental health practitioner is appropriate. A graded approach to exposure to feared situations, guided by a professional, paired with shared family and school messages about attendance and the promotion of a coping approach can be successful in improving attendance here.

**School withdrawal** - Regular pattern of not attending school with parent/carer consent often due to a range of factors.

Factors that can lead to withdrawing from school include: generational family poverty (difficulties buying uniforms, books, transport, food), care duties in the home, lack of recognised value in education, bullying, school failure and disengagement, family violence, family practices and structure (‘adultification’ of children, boundary dissolution), trauma, mental health issues or psychosomatic illness / physical illness of student or family members.

In families where these complex issues are effecting attendance, the situation can seem intractable and the management is often very draining for schools. It is crucial to form strong partnerships with the family and develop clear and consistent messages about attendance, explore flexible learning options and alternative educational pathways, effective use of secondary consultation, support families to engage with support offered, and maintain a positive school-home relationship.

**Truancy** - Non-attendance without parent/carer knowledge or permission.

Missing classes, avoiding certain subjects/teachers can be pre-cursors to a pattern of truancy. Truancy is often about school failure and engaging in activities that give more positive re-enforcement than attending school. Peer influence can play a role in disengagement. A rapid and consistent response to truancy that considers possible peer influence, re-engagement programs, individualised and flexible learning options and engaging the support of parents can be successful in improving attendance here.

**Vulnerable Cohorts**

We understand that special consideration may sometimes need to be given to students and their families from particular backgrounds or with particular living circumstances. Families deemed vulnerable by the school will be supported on an individual case by case basis in line with a jointly developed attendance plan.

## Staged Response to non-attendance

**STAGE 1 – Unexplained/unauthorised absence**

* Automated SMS sent via Sentral at 10 am when an unexplained absence is recorded by classroom teacher.
* Ongoing monitoring of attendance records will be done twice a term by office staff.
* If no attendance reasons entered via the Sentral portal or a phone call, letters will be printed and sent home twice a term seeking a reason for student absence from parents.
* Parents will be reminded through newsletters at the beginning of each term that they are required to make contact with school if their child is away. Parents to record reason on Sentral via the Parent Portal.

**STAGE 2 – three unexplained unapproved absences**

* After 3 days of unexplained absence, phone contact will be made with parent/guardian by classroom teacher.
* If contact is not able to be made via phone, a Sentral message is to be sent by the classroom teacher asking parents to contact the teacher to discuss their child’s absence.
* Once contact is made with parents, classroom teacher to update attendance on Sentral after a discussion with parents.

**STAGE 3 – five days or more of unexplained/unapproved absences**

* If contact via phone or Sentral messages is unable to be made by classroom teacher, the Engagement and Wellbeing Co-ordinator (Assistant Principal) will attempt to contact. All attempts at contact will be logged on Sentral.
* If Assistant Principal is unable to make contact, Sentral message sent home through the Parent Portal.
* Assistant Principal to raise concerns at Leadership meeting to discuss next steps if no contact made or ongoing concerns about reasons the child is away. Develop an action plan if required.
* Assistant Principal to increase offer of, or re-offer, support to families. Liaise with existing family service / seek support for family (if applicable).
* If no contact is made, send home ‘Stage 3’ letter along with the ‘Every Day Counts attendance fact sheet’ from the Department of Education.
* Parent meeting to be arranged with Assistant Principal, classroom teacher and Principal (if required).
* Allocate a mentor for the student.

**STAGE 4 – ongoing unexplained or unapproved absences**

All previous steps have been taken, with no improvement in attendance.

* Continue to attempt contact with parents, offering support and meetings.
* ‘Stage 4’ letter sent to parent/guardian regarding continued unexplained / unauthorised absences formally requesting presence at an Attendance SSG. To be signed and sent by Principal.
* Hold Attendance SSG: establish causes of non-attendance, develop Student Absence Learning Plan and/or Attendance Improvement Plan or Return to School Plan to support attendance as per DET Attendance Guidelines and advice. See: [Improving Attendance](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/studentmanagement/attendance/Pages/improve-attendance.aspx#link42).
* Initiate individual Check In/Check Out system (as required).
* Continue to support the student’s education with the development of a Student Absence Learning Plan.

**STAGE 5 – unresolved on-going non-attendance**

* Send ‘Stage 5’ letter to Parent/Guardian summarising all intervention and support offered. Parents required to respond within 7 days.

**STAGE 6 – Referral to School Attendance Officer**

* **The principal does not have to make a referral for all absences that meet the criteria but may continue to manage the absences at a school level.**
* ‘Stage 6’ letter sent from the Principal advising parents that the matter has been escalated to the School Attendance Officer.
* Referring a student attendance matter to a School Attendance Officer may be appropriate where the Principal determines that:
  + Intervention strategies have been unable to secure parental engagement and improvement in school attendance (or engagement in another educational program); and
  + Requiring the parent to respond to the notice will convey the seriousness of the matter and is likely to elicit an improvement in attendance.
* Principal/Assistant Principal may contact DET Regional Office – Wellbeing and Engagement Team for policy and process advice and secondary consultation.

**Additional Actions**

* Twice a term (Week 4 & 9) send home SENTRAL generated absence sheets for parents to sign and return to school explaining absence.
* Semester reports to include attendance for the semester.
* When a child’s attendance drops below 80% regardless of explanation, the student will be marked as an attendance concern and it will be discussed further at leadership. Decisions around next steps will be made and actioned as required.

**Medical Certificates**

* Parents may need to provide a medical certificate when requested by the school.
* Prolonged absence or repeated absence that is entered as illness will be monitored and if deemed appropriate the school may ask for a medical certificate from parents.
* Providing a medical certificate may become part of an attendance plan.

**Late Arrivals**

* Patterns of late arrival at school will be monitored.
* If students are identified as regularly arriving to school late, classroom teacher make contact home to discuss with the family.
* If the classroom teacher is unable to make contact via a phone call, a Sentral message is to be sent asking for the parents to contact the school.
* Leadership to continue to monitor arrival times of identified students.
* If no change, Leadership to phone home and if unable to make contact a Sentral message is to be sent requesting the parents call the school.
* If no change to the patterns of late arrival at school, a letter may be sent home by leadership.



# Every Day Counts

## Attendance fact sheet for primary school students

## School is better when you’re here

## Do I have to go to school?

Yes, in Victoria everyone aged from 6 – 17 has to go to school.

Missing one day a fortnight is the same as missing 4 whole weeks of school a year.

From Foundation to Year 12 that adds up to 1.5 years of school!

School is better when you attend. Your friends and your teachers notice that you are away and wonder if you are OK.

**Why is important that i go to school every day?**

Right now, being at school is the most important thing you need to do for your future. School helps you build good habits for later on in life. You might think school is just about Maths and English but you’re also learning about how to work with other people and how to solve problems.

Being at school every day also means you are becoming more independent as a learner and interacting with your friends and teachers. If you are at school you can get help from your teachers and friends and won’t have to try to learn things in your own time.

Being an adult probably seems far away but we know that young people who attend school more frequently have better outcomes after school too. This means they earn more money, have better job opportunities and are generally healthier. So being at school really does make a difference!

## Do my parents need to let the school know if I’m going to be away?

Yes. Your parents need to notify the school of your absence as soon as they can within three days of your absence. If they know you are going to be away, they should try to tell the school before the day or days you are away.

If you’re away from school too much and don’t have a reasonable excuse like a serious illness, your parents might get a letter from the principal asking about why you’re away.

## Are there any good reasons to be away from school?

No. Unless you are so sick you can’t get out of bed or there is an event like a funeral, you should be at school. Every day you are away is a day of classes and social connection you miss out on. Taking a day off for your birthday or go shopping isn’t a good reason to miss school.

Even medical and health appointments should be made either before or after school or during the school holidays. This includes family holidays. Your parents are encouraged not to plan holidays during the term but to organise these during the school holidays.



If you do have to be away for some reason, your parents need to contact the school and let them know what’s going on. Depending on the situation, the school might provide schoolwork for you to complete.

## if I’m not at school What do I miss out on?

You miss out on all the big stuff – class discussions and all the interaction that happens in a classroom, the chance to get help from teachers and the opportunity to practice skills and gain knowledge.

Being away means you might miss out on a lot of learning or that you need to catch up in your time.

If all of that isn’t enough to convince you to be at school every day, being away also means you also miss out on playing with your friends. Being away from school a lot can be lonely. It has a big impact on relationships and social connections.

Believe it or not, everyone wants you at school and it really is better when you attend.

## What if I’m having problems getting to school?

Getting to school on time everyday can be about having a good routine.

If you find yourself running late or missing school because you’re disorganised, try:

* Asking your parents for help getting ready
* Having a set time to go to bed
* Leaving all technology out of your bedroom
* Packing your school bag the night before with everything you need
* Having a set time for breakfast
* Planning to meet up with a friend so you can travel to school together.

Sometimes, though it can just be hard to go to school.

## Useful websites/contacts

**Kids Matter** - [www.kidsmatter.edu.au](http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/)

**Youth Beyond Blue** - [www.youthbeyondblue.com.au](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com.au/)

**Headspace** - [www.headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au/) or e-headspace [www.eheadspace.org.au/](https://eheadspace.org.au/) for online counselling & support

**Reach Out** – [www.reachout.com](https://au.reachout.com/)

**Kids helpline** - 1800 55 1800 24 hours a day, 7 days a week or [web counselling](https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/get-help/webchat-counselling/)

You might feel overwhelmed by the work or things might be tough with your friends. Maybe you don’t feel safe at school or you really dislike a teacher or things at home aren’t great. Perhaps you’re feeling down or anxious and don’t even really know why.

Whatever the situation is, staying away from school isn’t the answer. Many people want to help you. Try talking to:

* Your parents or another adult family member
* A trusted teacher
* Wellbeing Coordinator or the school counsellor
* Another trusted adult like your coach