

compulsory school attendance

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

The compulsory years of schooling

Did you know that if a student misses as little as eight days in each school term, by the end of primary school the student will have missed over a year of education?

In New South Wales, all children from six years of age are legally required to attend school or be registered for home schooling. After they complete Year 10 and until they turn 17 years of age, students then have the following options. They may also be in:

- full-time further education and training (eg TAFE, traineeship, apprenticeship)
- full-time, paid employment of an average of 25 hours per week; or
- a combination of both of the above.

Children are expected to attend all school activities, on time. Regular attendance helps your child:

- develop the skills needed to access the world of work and other opportunities
- learn the importance of punctuality and routine
- make and keep friendships.

Parents are asked to limit the times their children arrive late to school or leave early. Your child's school will have procedures to follow when this situation cannot be avoided.

What if my child has to be away from school?

If your child has to be absent from school, you must tell the school and provide a reason for your child's absence. To explain an absence parents and carers may be required to:

- send a note to the school, or contact the school via fax or email, or
- telephone the school, or
- visit the school.

The school will inform you of the required procedures for contacting the school.

A small number of absences may be accepted by the Principal. For example, if your child:

- has to go to a special religious ceremony

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- is required to attend to a serious and/or urgent family situation (eg a funeral)
- is too sick to go to school or has an infectious illness.

If you consider that it is in your child's best interests to be exempted from the legal requirement to attend school you must discuss this with the Principal.

Under certain circumstances the Principal can grant your child leave (no form required) or they will provide you with an 'Application for Exemption from Attendance at School' form and assist you to complete it. The Principal will consider your application and decide whether to grant a 'Certificate of Exemption from Attendance at School'.

Principals can grant exemptions from school attendance for fewer than 50 school days in a 12 month period. However if the request for absence from school is over 50 days the application must go through the Catholic Schools Office to the Minister. Parents intending to seek an exemption must give the Principal at least a full term's notice of the request.

These exemption regulations also apply for students requesting an absence from school to participate in employment in the entertainment industry, participation in accredited elite sporting programs and for students in Year 10 undertaking a full time apprenticeship or traineeship.

Parents of students who turn 6 years of age during the year and are not enrolled in a school need to be aware they are in breach of the law and should contact a school principal to discuss the situation. This situation can often happen when a child turns 6 later in the year.

What are school Principals responsible for?

It is important to understand that the school and the Catholic Schools Office may take further action where children of compulsory school age have recurring numbers of unexplained or unacceptable absences from school.

Parents (and sometimes their child) can be asked to attend a meeting with school staff and support personnel from the Catholic Schools Office. The aim of such meetings is to identify support strategies for the child and the family. Other agencies may be invited along to assist if parents agree.

Compulsory Attendance Conferences can be called when attendance continues to be an issue. These conferences are run by a trained convenor. This type of meeting seeks a written agreement from the parents to change the situation.

The new attendance requirements now in operation allow for legal compliance through the Children's Court by a Compulsory Schooling Order. Finally, if all attempts to address attendance fail, action can be taken in the Local Court and fines levied.

Further information

Further information can be obtained from the following websites.

**Policy and information
(Catholic Education Commission)**
<http://bit.ly/zdLonM>

**The school leaving age
(NSW Department of Education and Communities)**
<http://bit.ly/ginrQI>



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