

Attendance policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this page must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

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 and Children's Services Act 2019* (the Act) and the associated *Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020* (the Regulations)
- guide the actions of all staff working with children and young people and their parents 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'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 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 for 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.

Detail

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.

The Regulations stipulate that a leader's responsibilities include:

- the management of the day-to-day operations of the school
- the welfare and development of the students.

The Regulations stipulate that 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 Regulations 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 (single intake)

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 reviewed.
- **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 system in government school, preschool and other education and care settings.

Provide advice and support to leaders and educators to ensure the establishment, maintenance and promotion of effective preschool and school attendance improvement processes are in place (including collaboration with other agencies).

Education directors

Ensure attendance improvement is implemented consistently across their partnership as part of the preschool and school improvement planning cycle.

Monitor the development and implementation of school attendance improvement plans via site review processes.

Oversee reports and analysis of attendance data for their sites including via school annual reports.

Monitor and report on partnership improvements in attendance.

Provide advice to the department about potential state-wide strategies based on local information.

Inform executive directors or directors of children and young people identified to be at high risk in regards to attendance and actions undertaken to support them as appropriate.

Student Support Services

Responsible for ensuring the delivery of specialist advice and services to support targeted, intensive and coordinated interventions for children in education, early childhood and care services who require high-quality multi-disciplinary support.

They consist of social workers (truancy), psychologists, special educators, speech pathologists, behaviour support coaches, Aboriginal services engagement officers and their managers. Refer to [Student Support Services – Catalogue of Services \(PDF, 247.2 KB\)](#) and [Student Support Services Delivery Model \(PDF, 1.6 MB\)](#).

Preschool directors

Must ensure that the [preschool attendance recording procedure](#) is implemented by all staff.

School leaders

Optimise the attendance of all children and young people by making sure:

- all school staff are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the attendance of children and young people
- they work with staff and the school community to develop and implement their attendance improvement plan. These plans should reflect this policy and describe local strategies to support attendance and engagement
- information about the attendance improvement plan is communicated and easily accessible by staff, children, families and members of the public, especially vulnerable populations (including Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities and students in care)
- data is analysed to inform strategies and the review of local procedures that support attendance improvement
- reports on attendance are provided through the department's formal reporting cycles
- procedures, including parent notification and home visits, are in place to follow up non-attendance responses and ensure interventions are documented
- attendance records are maintained in EDSAS
- student attendance is monitored to identify habitual and chronic non-attenders so the provision of early, timely and appropriate supports can be put in place
- they refer to, consult with and work collaboratively with department staff and other relevant agencies to address attendance and related concerns, review whole-school systems, strategies and processes to ensure a continuous improvement cycle for individuals, families, schools and partnerships
- they remain engaged with the child or young person and their family before, during and after any interventions undertaken with Student Support Services

- mandatory notifications to Child Abuse Report Line (CARL) are made by staff as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, for concerns regarding:
 - a parent’s refusal to send the child to school or engage with any other education options available (including Open Access College or home schooling)
 - refusal of offers of support or attempts to help the family to overcome barriers to attendance
 - a family having disengaged
 - the child’s education being seriously interrupted by patterns of non-attendance that are enduring or ongoing in nature (noting that an enduring pattern does not require extended consecutive absence) as defined by the Department for Child Protection (DCP) in the [Mandatory Reporting Guide \(PDF 604KB\)](#).

School staff

Support departmental requirements and locally developed and agreed upon attendance improvement processes for the school.

Provide a relevant and dynamic learning program and environment that seeks to engage all children and young people and offers opportunity for success, thus encouraging regular attendance.

Record non-attendance according to departmental requirements.

Contribute to the analysis of attendance trends and the development of attendance improvement plans.

Implement attendance improvement plans.

Implement procedures, including parent communication, to follow up non-attendance.

Work with parents and government and non-government agencies to support children and young people’s regular attendance in the education program.

Refer to Student Support Services if support is required.

Make mandatory notifications as required by the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* and document and store as per departmental procedures.

In addition to the roles and responsibilities of departmental staff, parents, families and students are participants in attendance improvement and have the following roles and responsibilities.

Parents and families

Parents must enrol their child in an education program as per department policy or, at minimum, from 6 years (the age of compulsion) in line with the Education and Children’s Services Act 2019.

Parents must:

- enrol their child or young person in a school or approved learning program
- provide information to the school that may help planning for the child’s learning. For example medical conditions, developmental milestones and family issues

- ensure their child attends punctually on every day the education program is offered and to comply with the education program being offered
- provide an explanation to the school whenever their child is absent
- where appropriate, apply for an exemption when they wish to take their child out of school, such as family holiday
- work with the school on intervention strategies to improve attendance.

Parents can discuss with the principal any concerns relating to abuse or neglect or both that may require a mandatory notification as per the Responding to Abuse and Neglect guidelines.

Children and young people

Children and young people enrolled in a school have responsibility for their attendance.

The level of responsibility will be determined by the individual circumstances of the child.

It is expected that children and young people will:

attend school or an approved learning program on every day the program is offered

be punctual in arriving at school or the approved learning program and for all associated lessons and activities

participate appropriately in school and approved learning program activities.

Definitions

adult

Person who has attained 18 years of age.

approved learning programs

Include:

- SACE (South Australia Certificate of Education)
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- Steiner Education (Waldorf Schools) Secondary Certificate
- Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses or accredited courses offered by RTOs
- apprenticeships or traineeships
- university degrees, diplomas or other university award courses
- other programs authorised by the minister (or delegate).

A combination of the above.

authorised officer

The Act sets out people who are authorised officers. This includes any member from SAPOL.

In exercising its power under this section, the following people have been authorised by the department to also be an authorised person:

- senior social workers and social workers
- Aboriginal services engagement officers.

Authorised officers can ask a child or young person (or the adult they are with) in a public place for their:

- name, age and address
- reason for not being at school.

Authorised officers may at any time attend at residential premises and request any person in the premises to provide the officer with:

- the full names of all children and young people resident in the dwelling house
- the respective ages of those children
- the schools or the approved learning program in which, (if any) they are enrolled.

SAPOL officers also have the additional discretion to:

- return the child to the school or
- return the child to the guardian.

A person is guilty of an offence if they:

- hinder or obstruct an authorised officer, or a person assisting an authorised officer
- use abusive, threatening or insulting language to an authorised officer, or a person assisting an authorised officer
- when required by an authorised officer to answer a question, refuse or fail to answer the question to the best of the person's knowledge, information and belief
- falsely represent, by words or conduct, that they are an authorised officer.

habitual non-attender

A student who is absent for 5 days or more per term (average of 1 day per fortnight) for any reason

chronic non-attender

A student who is absent for 10 days or more per term (average of 1 day per week) for any reason.

compulsory school age

A child of or above the age of 6 years but under the age of 16 years (ie from 6 years 0 months to 16 years 0 months inclusive).

compulsory education age

A young person who is 16 years of age to 17 years of age.

EDSAS

The Education Department School Administration System (EDSAS) is the mandated electronic database provided to all department schools and contains student information including absence data.

home education

A child exempted from attending school whose education will be conducted by one or both of a child's parents from a home base. A child must be registered for home education with the department.

home visits

Home visits describe any meeting with clients and families outside of the school/educational setting. By definition they most regularly occur in the home but they may also be held in other public places such as a local café or library.

in loco parentis

A person acting in a parental style relationship with a child. For example, the person has intended to place themselves in the position of a parent toward a child where they have assumed the same duty and authority as a parent with respect to nurturing, control and protection of a child.

A person in loco parentis may include a person:

- in a de facto relationship with a child's biological parent where they have responsibility for the child or young person.
- with legal custody of a child
- who has taken over care of a child after the death of both biological parents, or where there has been a family breakdown and the child is estranged from both biological parents
- in an informal fostering arrangement.

This person does not have to assume any or all financial responsibility for a child to satisfy this definition.

Also refer to the definition of parent

legal guardian

A legal guardian is a person who has the legal authority (and the corresponding duty) to care for the personal and property interests of another person.

parent

A parent of a child includes:

- a biological parent who has parental responsibility of the child or young person
- a person who has been granted legal guardianship or custody of a child or young person by a court
- a step-parent of a child or young person who is responsible for the child or young person
- a person standing in loco parentis to the child or young person.

This does not include a parent of the child or young person who has had their legal responsibility or guardianship removed by a court, act or law.

prescribed reason for non-attendance

Under the Act the following are prescribed reasons for non-attendance at school and approved learning programs by children and young people:

- the child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by his or her sickness, or by his or her temporary or permanent infirmity
- there was a danger of the child being affected by an infectious or contagious disease
- the child was prevented from attending on the occasion in question by some other unavoidable and sufficient cause.

Additionally the following is also a prescribed reason for non-attendance in an approved learning program:

- the child was prevented from participating in the approved learning program on the occasion in question by reason of having to care for a member of their family.

providers of services

Non-government personnel who provide services to children and young people under compulsion to attend school. This may include personnel contracted to the department, for example pastoral care workers through the National Schools Chaplaincy program, case managers through Flexible Learning Options (FLO) and providers through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

qualification

Means a SACE (year 12) or at least a Certificate 2 (or equivalent qualification), under an approved learning program.

schools, preschools and other education and care settings

Government education, early childhood and care services at which education services (courses of instruction in preschool, primary or secondary education) are provided, or students enrolled, and who are registered with the education standards board per the Education and Early Childhood Services (Registration and Standards) Act 2011.

staff

Applies to all persons who are employed in the department.

step-parent

A person who is married to the parent of a child born to a previous relationship. To be considered a parent, the step-parent must be determined as being responsible for the child or young person. A step-parent is no longer considered a parent when their marriage to the child's parent is dissolved by divorce.

Also refer to the definition of parent.

Supporting information

[Student exemptions from attending school](#)

[Flexible learning options \(FLO\) enrolment](#)

Related legislation

[Education and Children's Services Act 2019](#)

[Education and Children's Services Regulations 2020](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services \(Registration and Standards\) Act 2011](#)

[Education and Early Childhood Services National Regulations \(2011\) and amendments \(2012\)](#)

[Equal Opportunity Act 1984](#)

[Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#)

[Disability Inclusion Act 2018](#)

[Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#)

Related policies

[Attendance matters in South Australian preschools and schools - attendance for learning, success and wellbeing 2018 to 2021 \(PDF 4,989KB\)](#)

[Enrolment policy](#)

[The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework](#)

[Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](#)

[Australian Curriculum – General Capabilities](#)

[National Quality Framework](#)

[On the Same Basis: Disability Standards for Education \(PDF 1,024KB\)](#)

[Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care](#)

[Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum](#)

[United Convention of the Rights of the Child](#)

[Wellbeing for Learning and Life Framework](#)

[Responding to abuse and neglect – education and care training](#)

[Responding to problem sexual behaviour in children and young people – guidelines for staff in education and care settings](#)

[Protective practices for staff in their interactions with children and young people](#)

[DCP Mandatory Reporting Guide \(PDF 604KB\)](#)

[Volunteer policy](#)

[Student Support Services delivery model \(PDF, 1.6 MB\)](#)

[Student Support Services catalogue of services \(PDF, 247.2 KB\)](#)

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Contact

Engagement and Wellbeing directorate

Email: education.attendance@sa.gov.au