

Attendance Policy

May 2023



**VIRTUAL
SCHOOL VICTORIA**



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Virtual School Victoria on 8480 0000 or feedback@vsv.vic.edu.au.

Rationale

Schooling is compulsory for children and young people aged from 6 to 17 years unless an exemption from attendance or enrolment has been granted. School participation maximises life opportunities for children and young people by providing them with education and support networks. School helps people to develop important skills, knowledge and values which set them up for further learning and participation in their community.

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. Whilst the model of schooling at Virtual School Victoria (VSV) has been established to ensure that students who are unable to attend a school in person during school hours are able to access their education remotely, VSV still requires that its students in Foundation to Year 10 are regularly attending online classes via video conferencing with their teachers so that teachers are able to monitor student learning progress, wellbeing and engagement. Regular attendance at online classes in Year 11 and Year 12 is encouraged wherever possible but not compulsory.

It is important that students, staff and parents/carers have a shared understanding of the importance of attending online classes when scheduled, even though that attendance is online at VSV.

Virtual School Victoria:

- is committed to providing a viable alternative to enable students to attend school virtually where they are unable to attend a school in person
- is committed to promoting the benefits of regular attendance at online classes
- believes successful students are well organised and start online classes on time
- believes non-attendance can place a student in unsafe situations and impact on their future employability and opportunities
- communicates, implements and monitors whole school strategies to improve regular attendance at synchronous online classes
- is aware that chronic non-attendance at online classes might be a sign of stress factors in a student's life outside and/or in the immediate learning environment. Our staged response to non-attendance allows us to respond quickly and work in partnership with students and their families
- believes attendance at synchronous online classes at school is the responsibility of everyone in the school community.

Overview

This policy provides the framework to a collaborative approach to the participation of VSV students in their synchronous online learning and school life.

It is to be read in conjunction with:

- VSV's [Student Wellbeing, Inclusion and Engagement Policy](#)
- VSV's *Student Management Action Plan (Staged Response to non-attendance)* in the Enrolment Handbook and Learning Advisor Teachers Manual.
- [DET Attendance Policy and Guidelines](#)
- [DET Exemption from School Attendance and Enrolment Policy and Guidelines](#)

This policy does not replace or change the obligations of VSV, parents/carers and School Attendance Officers under legislation or the School Attendance Guidelines.

Purpose

- Maximise the attendance of all students at scheduled synchronous online classes
- Support families in achieving regular attendance at synchronous online classes for their children
- Acknowledge that engagement and interaction with learning activities and coursework in VSV Online contributes to attendance and participation in learning in a virtual school.
- Provide organisational structures which support the early detection and identification of causes of student non-attendance and disengagement
- Identify and support all students at risk of non-attendance and disengagement
- Support staff in monitoring and following up all absences from expected attendance at synchronous online classes
- Ensure the accuracy of data collection for school improvement, review and policy compliance
- To record student attendance to meet various duty of care and other obligations.

Vulnerable cohorts

VSV recognises that school processes and approaches may sometimes need to be carefully tailored for students and their families who may be vulnerable, have special needs or who have other circumstances that need to be taken into consideration. Our school will identify individual students or cohorts who are vulnerable and whose attendance is at risk and/or declining and will work with these students and their parents/carers to improve their attendance through a range of interventions and supports.

Definitions

Parent – includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child, including parental responsibility under the Family Law Act 1975 (Cth) and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

Synchronous online classes – scheduled virtual online classes that teachers and students attend at the same time during which they can interact in ‘real time’.

Asynchronous online learning – students accessing learning materials at their own pace and according to their own schedule (e.g. completing course-work or watching a pre-recorded lesson)

Recording Attendance

VSV will record student attendance at every scheduled synchronous online class. This is necessary to:

- meet legislative requirements
- discharge VSV’s duty of care for all students.

Attendance will be recorded by the class or subject teacher using VSV Online for students in Middle Years (Year 7 – Year 10) and in teacher records in Primary (Foundation – Year 6) and VCE (Year 11 and Year 12) and saved in the shared drive.

Approved Absences from Attending Online Classes

VSV understands that there are some student cohorts for whom attendance at synchronous online classes is impractical and not possible due to legitimate reasons relating to the students’ enrolment category. For example:

- Students in Category 1a Medical: Physical and Category 1b. Medical Social/Emotional where their referring practitioner has identified that the student ‘requires additional support’ or ‘is not currently able’ to attend online classes on the Practitioner Agency Referral Form (PARF).

- Students in the Category 2. Travel may not be able to attend synchronous online classes due to time zone differences or other challenges of learning while travelling e.g. internet access in remote locations
- Students in Category 3. Sports/Performance are frequently unable to attend scheduled synchronous online classes due to training or performance commitments.
- Students who are a shared enrolment with another school where there is a clash with their mainstream school's timetable.

Each individual student's circumstances are considered and the discretion of the Student Coordinator and Leading Teacher: Engagement are applied to determine whether a student is exempt from the requirement to attend particular scheduled online classes. This is communicated and agreed with the student and their parent/carer at the beginning of year and monitored according to the student's circumstances.

Exemptions from attendance at particular synchronous online classes will be recorded in VSV's student database using the relevant code (e.g. 'student travelling', or 'student medical exemption')

Recording Absences

For absences from synchronous online classes where there is no exemption in place, a parent/carer must provide an explanation on each occasion to the school.

Parents/carers should notify VSV of absences by:

- notifying the student's Learning Advisor for any absences of a full day or longer;
- notifying the subject teacher (for students in Years 7-12) of absences for a single lesson.

If a student is absent from a particular scheduled synchronous online class and the school has not been previously notified by a parent/carer, or the absence is otherwise unexplained, VSV will notify parents by email. VSV will attempt to contact parents as soon as practicable on the same day of the unexplained absence, allowing time for the parent to respond.

If contact cannot be made with the parent (due to incorrect contact details), the school will attempt to contact any emergency contact/s nominated on the student's enrolment form held by the school, where possible, within 24 hours of the unexplained absence.

VSV will keep a record of the reason given for each absence on the student database. The Principal or their delegate will determine if the explanation provided is a **reasonable excuse** for the purposes of the parent meeting their responsibilities under the *Education Training Reform Act 2006* and the School Attendance Guidelines.

If VSV considers that the parent has provided a **reasonable excuse** for their child's absence the absence will be marked as '**excused absence**'. If the school determines that no reasonable excuse has been provided, the absence will be marked as '**unexcused absence**'.

The Principal or their delegate has the discretion to accept a reason given by a parent for a student's absence. The Principal or their delegate will generally excuse:

- medical and dental appointments, where it is not possible or appropriate to accommodate attendance in a scheduled synchronous online class
- bereavement or attendance at the funeral of a relative or friend of the student, including a student required to attend Sorry Business
- school refusal, if a plan is in place with the parent to address causes and support the student's return to attending synchronous online classes
- cultural observance if the parent/carer notifies the school in advance
- family holidays where the parent notifies the school in advance
- sports/performing arts commitments.
- on advice from a practitioner.

If no explanation is provided by the parent within 10 school days of an absence, it will be recorded as an 'unexplained absence' and recorded on the student's database record. Parents/carers will be notified if an absence has not been excused.

Managing Non-Attendance

Where absences from scheduled synchronous online classes are of concern due to their nature or frequency, or where a student has been absent for more than five days, VSV will work collaboratively with parents/carers, the student, and other professionals, where appropriate, to develop strategies to improve attendance, including:

- holding a Student Learning Action Meeting (SLAM)
- implementing an Engagement Plan for students who will be absent for an extended period
- arranging for assistance from relevant members of the Engagement Team, including Engagement Leaders and Engagement Coordinators.

We understand from time to time that some students will need additional supports and assistance, and in collaboration with the student and their family, will endeavour to provide this support when it is required. These special provisions are detailed below.

Referral to School Attendance Officer

If VSV decides that it has exhausted strategies for addressing a student's unsatisfactory attendance, we may, in accordance with the School Attendance Guidelines refer the non-attendance to a School Attendance Officer in the North-Western Victoria Regional Office for further action.

If, from multiple attempts to contact with a parent/carers, it becomes apparent that a student will not be returning to the school, the Principal or their delegate may make a referral to a School Attendance Officer if:

- the student has been absent from school on at least five full days in the previous 12 months where:
 - the parent/carer has not provided a reasonable excuse for these absences; and
 - measures to improve the student's attendance have been undertaken and have been unsuccessful
- the student's whereabouts are unknown and:
 - the student has been absent for 10 consecutive school days

Responsibilities

Virtual School Victoria

- Monitor each student's attendance and punctuality at synchronous online classes (subject teacher)
- contact parents/carers if an absence is unexplained by sending an email to request attendance and record actions (subject teacher)
- address attendance and punctuality concerns early through an Engagement Plan (Learning Advisor)
- determine the appropriate follow up to ensure the student's education and wellbeing are supported following a school absence (Learning Advisor)
- identify students who are at risk of disengaging from school (Learning Advisor)
- Escalate attendance concerns as per the Student Management Action Plan or SMAP (i.e. staged response to non-Attendance. (Learning Advisor and Engagement Team/Leader)
- coordinate Absence Learning Plan if absence is planned and approved (Learning Advisor with the support of the Engagement Team/Leader)
- Make DFFH/ChildFIRST notifications where appropriate (Learning Advisor with the support of the Wellbeing Team)

Student:

- Attend all scheduled synchronous online classes
- Arrive at all scheduled synchronous online classes on time and prepared to learn
- Talk to a teacher if you have issues that might impact your ability to attend synchronous online classes.

Parent/Carer:

- Ensure student attends synchronous online classes as scheduled and engages in both synchronous and asynchronous learning every day
- Provide a valid explanation for a student's absence/lateness/non-engagement (If no explanation is provided by the parent within 10 school days of an absence, it will be recorded as an 'unexplained absence' and recorded on the student database)
- Notify VSV of absences by contacting the Learning Advisor for absences of a day or longer or the subject teacher for a single class.
- Provide the school with advance notice if there is a planned up-coming school absence by informing the Learning Advisor
- Communicate openly with the Learning Advisor about a student's ongoing medical condition that may result in ongoing absence or medical appointments during school hours
- Communicate with the Learning Advisor about any other issues affecting their child's attendance and alert the Learning Advisor early to issues that may impact a student's attendance.
- Work in partnership with the school to address attendance concerns.

School Leadership:

- Ensure student attendance is recorded for scheduled synchronous online classes
- Ensure a record is kept of the reason given for each absence
- Consider the explanation given for an absence and whether it is reasonable in accordance with the Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- Ensure that processes are in place to document non-attendance strategies at whole school level
- Ensure that processes are in place to document non-attendance strategies at individual level on the student database e.g. home visits, phone calls, Attendance SSG's, SOCS referrals, DFFH/ChildFIRST notifications
- Make a referral to the School Attendance Officer as required
- Ensure processes are in place to document further enforcement proceedings around non-attendance, including: referral to the School Attendance Officer, issuing of a School Attendance Notice, infringement notice (and any appeal), court proceedings.

Communication

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website (or insert other online parent/carers/student communication method)
- Included in staff induction processes
- Included in staff handbook/manual
- Discussed at annual staff briefings/meetings
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Reminders in our school newsletter
- Hard copy available from school administration upon request

Further information and resources

The Department's Policy and Advisory Library (PAL):

- [DET School Attendance Guidelines](#)

Policy review and approval

Created date	May 2023
Endorsed by	Fiona Webster Executive Principal Signature:
Endorsed on	Date: 12th May 2023
Next review date	March 2026



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